

Women

And

Communalism



A Mahila Jagruthi Publication

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WOMEN AND COMMUNALISM

**(Collection of presentations that were made during a seminar
held on the 6th of December 1998 in Bangalore)**

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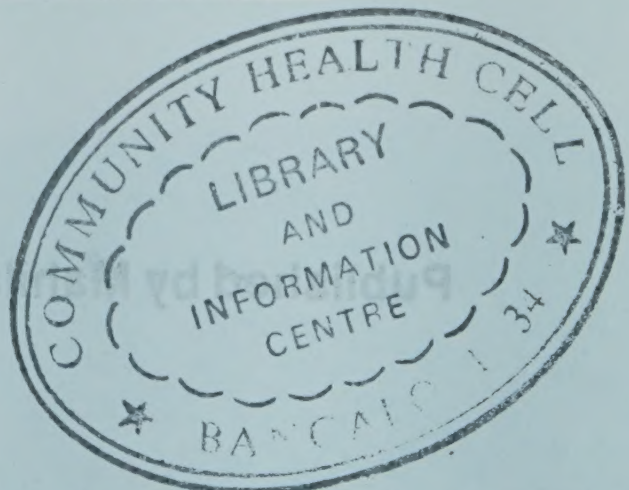
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This book is dedicated

to those

*who relentlessly oppose communalism
and bravely have stood for humanity.*

to those

*who have been fearless in
protecting and serving the people who are rendered homeless.*

*If there be fire
In one room of your house
Can you sleep
In another room?*

*If there be a corpse lying
In one room
Can you sing
In another room?*

*If there be
Bodies rotting in one room
Can you pray
In another room?*

*If yes,
Then I have nothing to tell you.*

Sarveshwar Dayal Saxena.

Contents

1. A Historical and Political analysis of Communalism.	1
Prof. Bhanu Prathap Das	
After Five Years...	12
2. Women and Hindutva Ideology	15
Dr. Ram Puniyani	
3. Myths about Minorities	21
Mr. Infan Ali Engineer	
4. Communalism in the current Context	27
Ms. Parvathi Menon	
5. Communal violence on women and the responsibility of the women's movement.	32
Ms. Lalitha	
Annexure I: Women and Communalism	42
Part of the Pamphlet that was printed for the December 6 th , 1998 Seminar.	
Annexure II: A few glimpses of Communal onslaught.	46
Part of the Pamphlet that was printed for the December 6 th , 1998 Seminar.	
Annexure III: Excerpts from Interviews with the women leaders of Rashtriya Sevika Samiti and Vishwa Hindu Parishad.	48

Publishers note

Communalism is fascist politics. It encourages hostility among different communities, bringing untold miseries to the most backward amongst the minorities such as Muslims, Christians and oppressed communities like Dalits and Women. The Hindu revivalists nourished by the upper caste and classes are aggravating the economic problems of the people. They are also destroying the thought process. They are made to look away from the real problems; they are creating new, unreal enemies. They are justifying violence against women including rape. Hindutva is a fascist ideology that is nationalist and religiously chauvinistic. This is finally aimed to destroy all the democratic spaces available in the society.

Mahila Jagruthi organised a workshop on 6th December 1998 to study and understand the history of communalism in India, its stand about women and minorities and the spread of communal violence and its vicious trap has reached unproportioned heights. This was the day when Babri Masjid was destroyed and the workshop was marking of that day. The workshop also emphasised the role women's movement has to take in the wake of monstrous violence of communal forces. We feel that these articles in this collection reinforce our task in building a strong anti-communal movement. We felt this is even more necessary at a point when RSS-BJP-VHP-Bajrang Dal- Shivsena is capitalising on the people in power at the center and spreading a feeling of threat and violence in the peoples mind.

We have included the pamphlets that were brought out during the workshop and the list of violence unleashed by communal forces as annexure. Annexure also include interviews with women leaders of RSS and VHP. These interviews clearly reflect the patriarchal bias of communal ideology very clearly. We are thankful to Dr.Bhanu Pratap Das, Dr.Ram Puniyani, Mr.Irfan Ali Engineer and Ms.Parvathi Menon for writing articles for this collection. We thank Uvaraj and others at Prakruti Mudrana and also thank all people who co-operated in making this book possible.

Annexure IV: Gujarat Riots: The top five myths & facts

Preface

I am glad that Mahila Jagruthi is publishing the proceedings of its workshop on communalism. To begin with the realization that, women's issues are deeply linked to the rising communalism is an important step in building the broader struggles for democratic society. The rise of the communal politics in a country ravaged by poverty, hunger, disease, misery and blatant violation of human rights is very worrisome. The ongoing concerns for real issues of the weaker and struggling sections of society have been sidetracked due to this emotion charged mass hysteria, which is the vehicle of communalism. While on surface it seems that this wants to bring the rule of one or the other religion, or that it wants a religious state. That is a mere ruse. It's being against the minorities, in our context Muslims and Christians, is also not the totality of its agenda. This is just the beginning and an incidental fact. In real sense the Muslims and Christians are the collateral victims of this politics of Hindutva. And this it pursues by creating a mass psychology, which demonizes these communities. While religion is not the only marker of society and individuals, this politics assumes that as the sole basis of its politics. Also it picks up issues like Ram Temple, Baba Budan Giri and cow slaughter etc. as these have the potential of raising the emotional hysterical pitch of the society. These issues lead to the outbursts of violence witnessed in the post Babri demolition riots or the Gujarat genocide. These riots further intimidate the minorities and ghettoize them, the distinction between 'Us' and 'Them' becoming more dominant in due course. This in turn leads to the rising divide between the communities and the cleavage in the National community. On the first count this politics pushes the real social issues to the margins, and the atmosphere, which

begins as the one aimed to intimidate the 'outsider' minorities, turns around and starts to intimidate the communities as a whole. By and large the communalists try to ally with the imperialist forces and uphold the Ultra Nationalism as their ploy to suppress the human rights of the people. And it's here that the core agenda of the religion based nationalism starts unfolding. In a democratic society, the accompanying liberal space is the ground on which struggles for substantive social, gender and economic justice unfolds. It tries to convert, by bits and pieces, the formal equality into substantive equality. It's a long march. With the stepping in of the religion into politics a total abolition of liberal space begins and there-by the struggles of weaker sections of society take a back seat, if not altogether suppressed. This politics is also opposed to the values of Liberty, Equality and Fraternity, the foundation of democratic society. The prime target of Hindutva, or for that matter any religion based politics be that Christian fundamentalism of US in the early decades of twentieth centuries or the Talibans of Afghanistan or Zia Ul Haque and Musharff regimes in Pakistan, is to suppress the social and gender justice, while putting a lid on the struggles for economic rights. In Indian scenario the transformation of caste and gender equations picked up by 1970s and Hindutva in a way is a counter reaction to that. From 1980 the coming to fore of US imperialism as the sole super power, the rise in the adverse effects of globalization, and rise of Hindutva have gone hand in hand. This effort of Mahila Jagruthi becomes all the more laudable as it identifies that women are as much victims of communalism as are the minorities, adivasis, workers and dalits. The essays contained in this book do touch on the various aspects of the politics of Hindu Right. Awareness of the problem is the first step to counter it. One is sure that the evolution of a democratic front for preservation of democracy will be possible only through such efforts. The front which can take on the emerging fascism, Hindutva, will have to begin as a platform of the groups like women, dalits, adivasis, workers and minorities. One hopes such valuable efforts will be broadened and depend in due course.

Ram Puniyani,

EKTA, Committee for Communal Amity



I am extremely grateful to the members of Mahila Jagruthi for inviting me to speak at the important workshop they have organized on women and communalism. I have been given the responsibility of making a historical and political analysis of communalism in India. What I shall do in my talk is to analyse from a historical and political perspective, the dominant communalism i.e. Hindu communalism, which poses a great threat to our society. I, of course, realize that there are other forms of communalism.

Like many of you, my mind goes back to what happened in Ayodhya six

A Historical and Political analysis of Communalism

years ago. I know that many of us who have gathered here today were opposed to the Ram Janmabhomi campaign of the Sangh Parivar, but perhaps none of us expected that the Babri Masjid would actually be demolished by a frenzied communal mob. Prime Minister Vajpayee has said that today is a day of introspection. What does this actually mean? As I speak to you, the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) has declared that today is a day of bravery and it is being celebrated in Ayodhya while at the same Muslims are not allowed to offer their prayers at the site where the Babri Masjid once stood. The VHP has mobilized people in Mathura and has resolved to liberate what it calls the Krishna Janmabhoomi Mandir.

Indeed we must analyse, how the Sangh Parivar succeeded in mobilizing masses of people to destroy the Babri Masjid, and also how organizations like the BJP and Shiv Seva came to power riding on the crest of this communal wave? First of all, we need to consider how the communalism of the Sangh Parivar became a mass phenomenon in the late 1980s and early 1990s. It is also necessary to understand what is going on today in the context of communalism.

There are some people who have defined the events of Ayodhya six years ago as the defining moment in Indian politics. I am not sure what they mean. Certainly communalism in India or specifically communalism of the Sangh Parivar was not heralded by these events. It is certainly not

true that the support for the Ram Janmabhoomi campaign was a spontaneous reaction to the so-called appeasement policies of the Congress or the recommendations of the Mandal commission, but rather it was conscious effort by the leaders and the followers of the Hindutva movement to mobilize people for political ends. Let me now turn to the historical roots of communalism in India. It is widely accepted that communalism in much of the former colonies is one of the undesirable legacies of colonialism. In the case of India, it usually refers to the antagonisms between the Hindu and Muslim communities. The communal phenomenon came to the fore in the 1880s even though antagonisms between sections of the Hindu and Muslim communities existed earlier. Many historians argue that the divide and rule policy of the British Colonialists in India manifested as competition for jobs between Hindu and Muslim elites and political patronage received by one or the other community. Communal riots broke out particularly in a few places in northern India by the latter part of the 19th Century. It was in this communally charged atmosphere in much of northern India and parts of western India, at a time when identities were rather sharply defined in terms of the communities -Hindu, Muslim and so on, that the most dangerous kind of Hindu communal organisations came into being. Let me get to the point right away and say that it was in the 1920s that Hindu communalism took a rather dangerous turn with the formation of the Hindu Mahasabha in 1923. The leader of this organisation was Savarkar, who really laid the theoretical foundations of Hindutva. He wrote a book called "Hindutva: Who is a Hindu?" He introduced the concept of Fatherland and Holy Land-Pitru bhoomi and Punya bhoomi. He says "A Hindu is a person who regards the area from the Indus to the seas that as both his Father Land and Holy Land". In doing so what he spells out is a Hindu supremacist ideology. He talks about other inferior races and communities, particularly the Muslims and the Christians. According to him if the geographical territory that we call India is not one's Holy Land then one is not a Hindu; meaning not an Indian. So, therefore, Christians and Muslims, who do not regard India as their Holy Land, are inferior. I should also say that it was Savarkar who also invoked Ram as a Hindu hero. So the appropriation of Ram by VHP is not something new. It has been there for a long time. Two years after the formation of the Hindu Mahasabha, the RSS was formed in 1925 and its founder was a person by the name of Hedgewar. Like Savarkar, he invoked Ram at just about every opportunity. In fact he went on to say that if Muslims accept Ram as a hero, the communal problem will be solved and it was during his time that the basic infrastructure of the RSS was set up. The shakhas were set up, the propagation of communal ideas began on a fairly large scale and the RSS was involved in fomenting riots. But of course, it was Golwalkar,

who, after assuming power in 1940 that the RSS came up with its true colours. Hedgewar, if you like was the moderate version of Golwarkar.

Before mentioning about Golwarkar's outlook let me say something about the Hindu Mahasabha and the RSS. They were organisationally different but ideologically similar. So it is not very surprising that Savarkar (the Hindu Mahasabha leader) was invited to speak by the RSS at their shakhas. So there was much exchange of ideas, but certainly they were organizationally different. It may seem a little strange, but the fact is that the Hindu Mahasabha was much closer to the Congress than the RSS. In fact, in the early stages, up until the early 1930's, there were many rank and file members of the Congress were also members of the Hindu Mahasabha and two presidents of the Congress party, Lala Lajpat Rai and Mahan Mohan Malaviya were also prominent leaders and presidents of the Hindu Mahasabha. I will have more to say about the role of the Congress in building communal politics in India, but let us now switch gears and come to the RSS and Golwarkar. Golwarkar started where Savarkar had left off. So taking Savarkar's theoretical foundations, he went further. He was inspired by Nazi Germany and Hitler in particular. In fact, he said that we in India should follow the German example, the Nazi example of racial purity" and then he went on to say what this means.

According to Golwarkar, "the Non-Hindus in India must accept Hindu culture and language" and he said it they don't "then they don't deserve any Rights, not even citizen rights'. So that basically was his concept of a Hindu Rashtra. If you think about it, although the times have changed, it is how now in 1998, the fundamental ideas, the most basic ideas of the Sangh Parivar, are still really based on the ideas of Savarkar and primarily on Golwarkar. Now that is basically what the Hindu Rashtra means. It is supremacy of the Hindus and non-Hindus must accept the Hindu language, the Hindu culture and everything that is Hindu for e.g. Muslims like Sikandar Bakth will be welcome if they accept Hindutva. So, when the RSS and BJP say that we do have Muslim members, what they mean is that these Muslims have to subordinate their identities to a larger Hindu identity. In other words, Golwalker imposes a monolithic idea, a monolithic concept of what it means to be a Hindu. So Hinduism is to be interpreted by the RSS, it cannot have many variants. Ram is the central figure. He is the God that has to be worshipped in all parts of India, not just in northern India, but even in eastern India where they worship other Gods and Goddesses. So, it is this monolithic version of Hinduism, which is the hallmark of Hindutva. I should also point out, RSS tried to distinguish itself from Hindu Mahasabha, by saying that it is a cultural organisation. That may be true, but it was not just a cultural organization. It was a cultural organization with a clear-cut

objective of establishing a Hindu Rashtra. From a very early period it realised that it is important to indoctrinate and win over people who practice Hinduism in different ways and this was the purpose of the shakhas and the schools that were set up; the Saraswati Shishu Mandirs and so on. The RSS was very clear that the people have to be ideologically moulded. The Hindu Mahasabha on the other hand, had a political component and therefore Hindu communalists who were in Congress could easily become members of the Hindu Mahasabha as well.

At the time of Independence, the Congress party clearly was the dominant political force. It was sort of a mass movement, not progressive in character, but certainly, it had people from different backgrounds and classes as members. But it basically represented the interests of the propertied classes and the privileged classes and it has also played a rather reprehensible role in undermining the struggles of the workers and the peasants in different parts of India. I will not go into that, but I just want you to bear in mind that the Congress had a definite class character.

It is also well known that the Congress had many Hindu communalists as members. The most prominent among them was Vallabhai Patel, who was India's first Deputy Prime Minister and Home Minister. He even went to the extent of saying that we don't need the RSS, because the Congress can do the job of the RSS. In other words, he was saying that the idea of a Hindu Rashtra can be propagated through the Congress, one doesn't need the RSS for that and there are several examples where he has played a communal role. It is indeed widely known that he was soft on the RSS. After Gandhi's murder, the RSS was banned and it was Patel who was largely responsible for lifting the ban on it a year and a half later. All that the RSS had to do was to pretend that it will abide by the written constitution and things of that sort and the ban was lifted. His attitude to Muslims and Muslim organizations was extremely communal. It was not just Patel, there were a whole host of other people, who had an ideology that did not differ greatly from the RSS and therefore, it is not surprising that when the first Government was formed after Independence, with Nehru as the Prime Minister, there were two members of the Hindu Mahasabha in that cabinet, Shyama Prasad Mukherjee and Nirmal Chatterjee. It may seem rather amazing to some people that a so-called secular Government can accommodate the worst communal elements in its fold. The communal aspects of congress is not something that has been fabricated, it was and still is a fact. It was in 1949, that Nehru had to say that the pillars of the Congress party had become very communal and have joined hands with the Hindu nationalists, by that he meant the RSS. I will not go into the details, but I would like to point out that by 1950, Shyama Prasad Mukherjee

had developed differences with Nehru. He criticized Nehru as being too soft on Pakistan and he resigned from the central cabinet. With the help of the RSS he formed the Jana Sangh, which was the forerunner of the BJP, in 1951. The Jana Sangh was indeed the political wing of the RSS. It was not formally represented that way, but the fact is that the Jana Sangh was set up with the help of the RSS. Vajpayee was involved in it and so was Advani. The Hindu Mahasabha began losing ground after independence; it got weaker and weaker and was eventually marginalised. So, the politics of Hindutva, the politics of this Hindu Rashtra was represented by the Jana Sangh. The RSS continued its so-called cultural activities; running the shakhas and the Saraswati Shishu Mandirs, instigating riots, carrying out its vicious propaganda against Muslims. The political campaigns, however, were all taken up by the Jana Sangh. The modus operandi of the RSS and the Jana Sangh was to approach the refugees, people who had come from Pakistan. In 1950, there was an exodus from the then East Pakistan; the RSS also tried to bring them into its ranks. I don't have time to go into all the campaigns of the Jana Sangh, but I should mention that it was in the early 50's probably in 1952 maybe in 1953, that the Jana Sangh began campaigning about Kashmir. It opposed Article 370 of the constitution, which gave certain rights to the state of Kashmir. It did not give them the Right to Self Determination, but it gave them some very limited autonomy and Shyama Prasad Mukherjee went to Kashmir to oppose that, and there was a local outfit and they joined hands and carried out a communal campaign. Through campaigns that were directly and indirectly aimed against the Muslims, the RSS and Jana Sangh tried to expand. I should also mention at this point; and this might surprise many people that some of the RSS leaders, in particular, Nana Deshmukh became part of the Sarvodaya Movement. The Jana Sangh was also part of the J.P Movement in Bihar. Jayaprakash Narayan even said things that were laudable about the RSS. J.P. is on record on having said that "the Bihar movement and the RSS, both stand for social transformation" and he tried to portray the RSS as a social organisation, trying to bring about progressive changes in the society and of course, you know what happened later- the Jana Sangh became part of the Janata Party coalition after the Emergency. So, the point that I am trying to make is not just the Congress party that was soft on Hindu Communalism, but it was a large number of mainstream politicians including J.P that had a similar attitude and the RSS was its major beneficiary.

Apart from all this, the RSS was also actively involved in the North-East, in some of the tribal areas and it condemned Christian missionaries for converting Hindus to Christianity and it tried to win over people in the North-East and some of the tribal areas of Madhya Pradesh.

The post emergency period is rather important to understand the politics of Hindutva. The Janata Party, of course, collapsed in the weight of its own contradictions, but it was during that period that the Jana Sangh, the political expression of the RSS found very valuable ally in Morarji Desai. Recently, you have heard about the controversy surrounding the Indian Council for Historical Research, the ICHR. It is not something that is entirely new, it is certainly more intense now than what happened earlier, but action against an important ICHR official was taken during Morarji Desai's time because Morarji Desai shared the communal views of the RSS to some extent. History books written by Romila Thapar, Bipin Chandra and various other leftists academics were condemned by Morarji Desai and there was an effort to ban them. So this is what the Jana Sangh through the RSS tried to achieve after the Emergency. Of course, later on complications arose about dual membership, about being a member of the Janata party and the RSS, which the RSS member could not stomach and it pulled out of the Janata Party coalition. Of course, the post Emergency period was a difficult period initially for the Sangh Parivar and it really had to re-think its strategy of a Hindu Rashtra. Around this time, of course, as you know, after the Jana Sangh pulled out of the Janata Party, it appeared in the form of Bharatiya Janata Party in 1980. But, it was a little earlier in 1979 that the RSS realized that it is not just sufficient to have a parliamentary extension it has to go beyond that. It has to propagate communal ideas among the masses and for that, it is not possible to use people like Vajpayee, and even Advani to some extent. So it was in this context that the Vishwa Hindu Parishad(VHP) that was set up in 1964, was activated. The VHP, through the RSS had operated in the North-East in the past. But they were told that they must take on a much more active role. They should mobilise masses of people and of course the eventual idea was to build a Hindu Rashtra That was in 1979 and of course, as you know, after the Meenakshipuram conversion, the VHP came to the fore and became visible in 1981.

It is indeed important to realise that the Sangh Parivar is like a hydra—multi-headed monster, which head it rears at which time depends on what it perceives to be most conducive to setting up of the Hindu Rashtra. So, therefore, I think in the early 80's the Sangh Parivar, the RSS, which is its core organisation, felt that it is important to have something like the VHP that can take on more of an activist role in propagating communal politics. In one of the meetings in 1982, the question of Ram Janma Bhoomi came up and a decision was taken to have a campaign on "Ram Janma Bhoomi" in Ayodhya. So you must realise that this strategy was something that was devised by the leaders of the Sangh Parivar. It was not something that was

demanded by the local community. Of course, to do that, it again had to propagate the myths, the slanders, the lies that had been around for decades, and in addition they had to fabricate new slogans, new threats, use new symbols. So, the VHP got into action in the early 1980's and in 1983, they launched a nation wide campaign. It was called the Ekatmata Yagna as you all probably remember and this went on in different parts of the country, the North, East, South and West and again overtly Hindu symbols- Ganga water, Ram and various other symbols were used. It was a subliminal message: propagating the idea of a Hindu Rashtra, Hindu purity, Hindu racial supremacy and so on. Now, the very next year, in 1984, there was the Ram Janma Bhoomi Yatra and between, 1985 and 1989, I don't know how many such yatras must have happened. There was a concerted effort to convert peoples communal prejudices to well entrenched communal consciousness. That took place in much of the late 1980's and it culminated in Advani's Rath Yatra in 1990. The communal propaganda at that time did not follow a single track. Apart from myths being propagated, apart from slanders being told, the Sangh Parivar brought bogus arguments like appeasement of Muslims and other minorities to the fore and what was being really developed was a communal consciousness; prejudices being transformed to hatred of minorities, Muslims in particular. So, that was what happened. It is certainly true that the Congress has been trying to appease at times certain minority groups and the Shah Bano case is an example of that. But let me tell you, that the mobilisation that took place and the decision to mobilise people to set up a Hindu Rashtra was not just a reaction to the Shah Bano case, as it is made out by the communalists and their sympathisers. That took place later in 1985. The Ekatmata Yagna, and the decision to launch nation wide campaigns, preceded the Shah Bano case. Certainly the Shah Bano case did help the Sangh Parivar's communal propaganda, as did the Mandal Commission. You may remember that V.P.Singh accepted the recommendations of the Mandal commission and that polarised Hindus, especially in northern India and that was one of the reasons, why the BJP could mobilise many people in that part of the country, especially in U.P. There the division took place along caste lines to a large extent. There are contributing factors to that, the Shah Bano to some extent and the Mandal Commission to a large extent. But this was a well-orchestrated move. I think, here, you see an example of a communal political force that uses myths, lies, and slanders to advance its cause, the cause of a Hindu Rashtra. So, let us not accept this bogus argument, that the Ram Janma Bhoomi movement was a reaction to the Shah Bano case, and that this was a reaction to Mandal Commission. The reasons are much deeper; it is a process that has been going on since the 1920's. It is an example of how a political force can mobilise people for a reactionary cause.

Yes, it is true that in U.P at least, a mass movement had been built for the Babri Masjid destruction, but it was a reactionary mass movement, it was a communal movement, and it also went as far as it did because it had the support of the state machinery. BJP, as you may remember was in power in U.P at that time. If you think about the role of the Congress in all this, it was not to appease the Muslims, but to appease the Hindutva forces; the communalists. How else can one explain the role of the Central Government in the entire Ayodhya episode? How else can one explain the role of the Congress during the Bombay riots? If that is not appeasement of the Hindu communalists, then I don't know what is. If you remember on 6th Dec that night, Narasimha Rao, the then Prime Minister, said on Doordarshan that "we shall rebuild the mosque", now what has happened to that? So, the point is that this event, the destruction of the Babri Masjid, 6 years ago is also a very poor reflection of the Congress.

Certainly what happened in Ayodhya 6 years ago was something that is disturbing. What is even more disturbing was that the perpetrators of those crimes; the BJP, Shiv Sena-which masterminded the riots in Bombay following the destruction of the Babri Masjid, were elected to power. You know that India today is run by the BJP and its allies, and the Shiv Sena is in power in Maharashtra. It is possible, that they might lose the elections, the next time around, but the question is that how could parties, how could political movements that have committed crimes against humanity be elected to power? That certainly is a disturbing thing. It probably means that a large number of people are susceptible to the propaganda of the Sangh Parivar. I am not saying that people by and large, condone communalism or approve of it, but as you probably know, the communalism of the majority community is seen as something which is in reaction to the problems that are created by minorities and this is where myths, slanders, propaganda work very effectively. What we have in India is an example where a retrogressive force has the support of the State, both ideologically and sometimes even logistically. Given this situation, where do we stand and what should we do in political terms? Remember that when the Samajwadi party and the Bahujan Samaj Party came to power in U.P after the elections in 1993, many people held that as an example of how to fight communalism politically and there are many people who said that there is no need for working outside the system—one can defeat the communalists within the boundaries of mainstream politics and in fact, former activist of APCLC had this point of view. This is what he told me in early 1994. He told me the same thing last year and I had to remind him then that the SP and the BSP are no longer in power in U.P, but it is the BJP that is back in power. We have a situation where there are two dominant political parties in India at the moment, Congress and the BJP. An academic from Delhi, Aijaz Ahmed

described BJP's communalism as programmatic, that it is part of its programme. I think what he is trying to say is that, the BJP which is an extension of the RSS, has the Hindu Rashtra as the central part of its programme, whereas he described the politics of the Congress as pragmatic communalism. So, he said that it is a question of programmatic communalism Vs the pragmatic communalism. Now I personally think that the Congress's communalism is actually more than that, it is true that the Sangh Parivar which has alienated the Muslims and more recently the Christians, but it is the Congress which has alienated the Sikh community.

This pragmatic communalism is not just limited to the Congress. It is across the board. When you think about the present alliance that the BJP has with various parties, we have people who were leaders of the Janata Dal- Ramakrishna Hegde for example, we had people who were socialists earlier, who opposed the Emergency, George Fernandes, and now it is difficult to find anyone who can be closer to the BJP than George Fernandes. Various other parties may also move towards the BJP. In the state of Orissa, where the Janata Dal was rather strong a few years ago has split and the majority faction, which became the Biju Janata Dal, is now part of the BJP alliance. So these are the kinds of problems that we face today that, for example Telugu Desam which was an important constituent of the United Front which claimed to be secular, is now entirely with the BJP, not just a few leaders or not just the rank and file, the entire party is with the BJP and Chandrababu Naidu was the convenor of the United Front. Of course we must also recognise that the BJP did come to power in the Centre at least in part, because of misrule and misdeeds of the Congress at the Centre or the United Front at the Centre, and also of the various constituents of the United Front in various states. There were many people in Karnataka who say, they would prefer the BJP to J.H. Patel. So the point is that the present mainstream politicians cannot be our allies in a fight for a secular society. By secularism, I just don't mean the separation of the state and religion; I mean it in a much broader sense. I mean, a genuine respect the rights of all communities. In our context, I mean a society in which the dominant culture is not the Hindu culture. Consciously or unconsciously we do allow practices that are contrary to this to take place. For instance, in schools and colleges and other institutions, we celebrate Hindu festivals in schools and colleges. But you have you ever heard of a school or college celebrating a Muslim festival? If you suggest such an idea, people might think you are out of your mind or that you are a Pakistani agent. So, that is the situation we are in now. We have a situation where it is question of programmatic communalism Vs the pragmatic communalism. Indeed this pragmatic communalism has paved the way for programmatic communalism to

come to power. The BJP not only has a communal agenda, but it furthers the reactionary agenda of other political parties. Nuclear weapons are an example of that. The architects of the Nuclear weapons programme were Nehru and Baba, but it was the BJP that pulled the trigger and of course it might do it many more times. The Sangh Parivar certainly represents the most brazen form of communalism in this country. There is no question about this.

The political landscape in India today is dominated by the Congress and the BJP. They are the only two stable or at least semi stable political formations. One could have various kinds of transient phenomena that might not last too long, you know the National Front, the United Front, the Janata party, but it is the BJP and the Congress which have a certain organisational structure which gives it certain political stability. So as I see it in the long run, political power is going to be in the hands of the Congress or the BJP. The danger is that as the crisis in India deepens and given the social realities, i.e. the fact that the Hindu majority community has prejudices which can be transformed as in the case of Ayodhya, into a well entrenched communal consciousness, there is a great danger from the Hindu communalists and this has been evident the last 8 to 9 months. We can clearly see that there are certain important elements in the RSS who want the present Government to further its projects through educational institutions and various other means and if it succeeds, i.e. the Sangh Parivar can bring about a retrogressive mass movement then that is the closest that we can get to fascism. I am not using the term fascism as a propaganda term; it has a specific meaning. What I mean to say is this: fascism is not just authoritarianism, it is not just a dictator coming to power, like in Latin America and remaining in power with the support of some outside forces like the United States. If that is the case, then once the outside force withdraws its support, the people can unite and throw off the dictator. But here the situation is more like in Nazi Germany. If the Sangh Parivar captures political power on its own and is able to sustain the support of the masses then we could be in for fascism.

At a time when the society is going through a crisis, the masses of people can go in a reactionary direction that is represented by Hindutva or it can go with the progressive forces. It depends on the strength of a particular political movement, at a given point in time. So given the weakness of the progressive forces in India, we have a real chance that when there is a long term crisis here there could be a strong drift towards Hindutva. Let me tell you that more Ayodhyas could happen. The VHP as I speak is talking about liberating Krishna Janma Bhoomi and they are celebrating the day of bravery in Ayodhya today. So those forces are actively at work

and at times of crisis, large masses of people can move towards them as they have a stable political structure and a well-defined objective. So our task is well cut out. It is a political struggle no doubt and this has to be done outside the framework of the mainstream political parties because you never know whose going to be Sangh Parivar's ally tomorrow. It could be the DMK; they have said that, if necessary, they will support the BJP. So, we do have to think about a nationwide peoples movement against communalism and for secularism and we can discuss more about that later, but we also have our task well cut out at the social level. The struggle against communalism must also be taken up socially. I am sure all of us have family members, who have prejudices against Muslims, I am sure you have all come across communalism in schools and colleges, so it has to be fought at various levels in society. So the struggle for secularism, which is very very worthwhile in the Indian context, is both a political and a social struggle.

Dr.Bhanu Pratap Das

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After 5 years....

It has been five years since the author presented the talk reproduced above at a seminar on Women and Communalism organised by Mahila Jagruti in Bangalore. Indeed the points made there have been borne out by the events of the intervening period. Large-scale communal riots broke out in Suratkal and Mangalore shortly after the seminar i.e. towards the end of 1998 and continued into early 1999. The Sangh Parivar and the mainstream media claimed that they were in spontaneous reaction to the harassment of Hindu girls by Muslim boys. However, the findings of the Peoples Democratic Forum, a Bangalore based democratic rights organization suggest that the origin of the riots lie in the blatant anti-Muslim propaganda by the different constituents of the Sangh Parivar. Communal politics in Karnataka is not just limited to Suratkal and Mangalore. It actually finds its strongest expression in the Sangh Parivar's Baba Budangiri campaign, which began assuming ominous proportions from 1998. This campaign is led by the VHP and the Bajrang Dal. The Sufi shrine In Baba Budangiri situated 30 kilometers from Chikmagalur symbolises an integral part of Karnataka's syncretic traditions. However, in the words of a prominent leader of the Bajrang Dal, "the Islamisation of the shrine must stop". Pravin Togadia, International Secretary of the VHP and Anantha Kumar, President of Karnataka BJP have both declared that they intend to make Baba Budangiri the Ayodhya of the South. It is therefore not surprising that the Sangh Parivar has demanded that the character of the shrine be changed and that Hindus should have exclusive right to it. However, it is indeed heartening that a coalition comprising of a number of different secular organizations and political parties has emerged a little over a year ago and it has been consistently opposing the communal propaganda of the Sangh Parivar. About 10,000 people recently took part in a historic rally organized by this coalition against the communalization of the Baba Budangiri shrine. Far from restraining the Sangh Parivar, the Congress government in Karnataka has actually been permitting it to carry out its provocative activities. It even to the extent of

arresting about a thousand secular activists who had wanted to protest against the elaborate communal programme of the Sangh Parivar in Baba Budangiri. The soft Hindutva of the Congress is not just confined to Karnataka. It was evident in Madhya Pradesh, Chattisgarh and Gujarat. The pragmatic communalism of the Congress mentioned in the talk is not a thing of the past. It is very much alive today. While the Sangh Parivar seeks newer Ayodhyas, it has by no means abandoned the original Ayodhya. Ever since the VHP announced in its Dharam Sansad in March 2002 about its intention to construct the Ram temple at the site of the demolished Babri Masjid in Ayodhya, it has carried out an aggressive campaign to bring this plan to fruition. Clearly the Sangh Parivar is doing this with an eye to the next elections in UP. Many senior members of the BJP have even talked about introducing a legislation in the parliament to build the Ram temple. The VHP for its part has dramatised this matter not simply by making inflammatory statements, but also by mobilising its cadres in the streets as it did in Ayodhya in October 2003. Indeed the Ram temple issue remains a powder-keg. The Sangh Parivar has also been furthering its agenda by ways that are somewhat subtle. It realizes that history books have to be rewritten and its version of science and mathematics presented to school and college students in order to propagate its ideology to the future generations. It is with this understanding that the Ministry of Human Resources and Development has undertaken a massive project to introduce new textbooks, particularly in the areas of history, science and mathematics.

No recent account of communalism in India will be complete without reference to the gruesome events of Gujarat in 2002. Indeed they have shocked the conscience of every person who has an elementary sense of rectitude. They make the killings of Graham Staines and his two minor sons look like child's play. It is now widely recognized that the atrocities against the innocent Muslims in Gujarat could not have taken place without the active support of the state machinery. This has been well documented by several human rights organizations who have carried out fact finding in Gujarat under very difficult conditions. The role of the state in stoking the communal fire and abetting the criminals was so obvious that not only the opposition parties, but also some of the constituents of the NDA demanded the resignation of Narendra Modi, the Chief Minister. The charade of Modi submitting his resignation and the party not accepting it was played out at the national executive committee meeting of the BJP in April 2002. It was in this meeting that Vajpayee revealed his true face by declaring that "In Indonesia, Malaysia, wherever Muslims live they don't want to live in harmony." He attributed the violence in Gujarat to the Godhra killings. He asked rhetorically, "Who lit the fire? How did it spread?" However, after the Supreme

Court criticised the Gujarat government for attempting to deny justice to the victims of the communal riots, Vajpayee had to change his position and he said that what happened in Gujarat was a "tragic aberration". The state sponsored pogrom in Gujarat and the propaganda that accompanied it led to an almost complete polarization of the Hindu and Muslim communities and translated into a resounding electoral victory for the BJP. This realpolitik of the Sangh Parivar is cruel and inhuman to the core, but it paid rich dividends. The Sangh Parivar is so ecstatic about it that it hopes to replicate the "Gujarat model" in other states. It seems to be confident of winning the next general elections, particularly after its recent victory in Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Gujarat. This prospect is not something that can be taken lightly by those who are committed to the principles of secularism. Ashok Singhal, the President of VHP in a speech a few months ago said, "secularism is the biggest enemy of the nation." He urged the youth in his organization to wipe out secularism and make the Bajrang Dal and Durga Vahini strong in the next three years." To make the country a Hindu Rashtra is our ultimate objective", he said. Shades of fascism indeed! It is only the large-scale mobilization of people against the Sangh Parivar and a clear understanding of Hindutva and its various nuances that can prevent India from gradually drifting towards communal fascism.

Dr.Bhanu Pratap Das



I would like to begin my talk by drawing your attention to the fact as to why an organisation like Mahila Jagruthi feels the need to be concerned about communal problem. As per my understanding of Hindutva phenomenon, it primarily aims at suppressing the rights and aspirations of the most exploited and weak sections of the society. It is not only the Christians and Muslims who are victims of this oppression, but also the women, who I feel, are the worst targets.

Hindu Right and Women

While pondering over this topic, there are contradictory points, which come to our mind. First Point is regarding Hindutva against women. How do we understand the same party, BJP, which is calling for 33% reservation for women is also the party whose women and men functionaries have passed opinions against the women's rights? Second, in the Education Minister's (organised by Murli Manohar Joshi, a top leader of BJP) conference, a proposal was mooted for special provisions for educating the girl child. And what were these special provisions? Girls in mid and high school should be taught cooking and home management as part of their curriculum. I would not treat this as a minor issue. It is certainly very significant and we shall now see how we can understand this issue.

The Hindutva phenomenon is opposed to women's liberation movement on the grounds that "Well in India, why are you talking about women's liberation? India is a land where women are always worshipped. And we do not need any particular ideology about women's liberation as we have already given them a high place in the society as goddesses."

I'll come to the other statements by Sangh Parivar a while later. Let us travel back to the ancient days, when the so-called Hindu religion prevailed and women were worshipped. It is true that a few women did contribute to the Vedas and the Upanishads but that was again a very marginal participation. However, the major statement about the status of women at that particular point of time was from Manu Smriti,

Manu Smruti was not a fictional or imaginary piece by Manu. It was representative of the type of society at that time. And what does Manu say about the position of women? **A woman is always a dependent being.** She is dependent on her father at a young age, later on husband and son. **Woman was always regarded as property of man. She was equated to a field where men plough and so the production of the field belonged to the men.** This was in 2nd Century AD now travelling straight to 15th Century AD; a period when Tulsidas, the famous poet saint lived. He said "*Dhol, pishach, ,shudra. pashu. nari sakal tadana ke adhikari*" which means, the drum, untouchable, animal and woman deserve to be beaten. That was their status in society. The point I'm trying to make here is that the position of women in the second and 15th century was little different from the second century. The first conscious fabrication by Hindutva ideologues is that we in India always had a place of pride for women. This was said so that the women would not be able to struggle for equal rights in the society. Also it is being said that it is due to Islam and the 'barbaric' Muslim invaders that women's position in society degenerated. Let's remember here that Islam itself came into existence from 7th century. The position of women in the society started changing with newer ideas that underlined liberty, equality and fraternity as basic hallmark of the society. This marked the particular point of transition from where the terminology- man and wife - changed to 'husband and wife'.

The first efforts to change the situation in India began with Raja Ram Mohan Roy, He was a strong opponent of the sati tradition where a woman was burnt on the pyre of her husband. After this we come to two parallel streams, parallel in the sense that they could never meet and they were equally opposed to each other. On one hand we have Mahatma Phule, Pandit Rama Bai and on the other we have Savarkar, Golwalkar and other Hindutva ideologues. Among the first stream of thinkers, Phule said that women should come out in the social field and for this they should be educated. It is in this period that some women broke the shackles imposed by the society.

I'll straight go into Ambedkar and Hindu Code Bill, Ambedkar was given the responsibility to draft the Hindu Code Bill and in the Bill Ambedkar tried to give as much equality and fairness to women. The Bill was strongly opposed by Hindu right wing and reactionary elements within Nehru's cabinet. The opposition was so severe that Ambedkar was forced to resign from his cabinet post. In India, after 1960 when Mathura rape case occurred, the women's movement started picking up and articulating the aspirations of women in the society.

Now we shall see what the other stream was saying. I shall begin with Savarkar. In one of his writings he criticizes Shivaji who is respected by people of all religions and women in general. He is commenting on the episode when Bassein Nawab's daughter-in-law was brought as part the loot. You all know that earlier it was a prerogative of kings and feudal lords to pick up a beautiful woman and to make them part of their Harem (Concubines). The daughter-in-law was brought to Shivaji and Shivaji respectfully commented, "Alas if my mother was as beautiful as you, even I would have been a good looking person." Shivaji was not like other kings who would misuse women. Now we shall look at our great ideologue's comment on the episode. He says, here there are Muslims who have raped our women and Shivaji had an opportunity to teach a lesson to these Muslims by giving them tit-for-tat, Savarkar sees this episode as a battle between two communities and he is of the opinion that as a retaliatory measure, the need to rape the Muslim woman is justified. This is what Savarkar is trying to imply in his criticism. So what is the great ideology of our Hindutva activists? If you want to take revenge against a community, you can do so by defiling the women of that community. Women are the symbol of honour of a community. So if you want to humiliate a community, the women of that community should be subjected to ill treatment. Savarkar's advice was 'well taken' by the people of Surat in the massive riots of 1992-93!

Now we go to the next major Hindutva ideologue Golwalkar. Golwalkar in his writings says that nature has created different types of place for man and woman and they have different roles to play in the society. What is important is to maintain or see that there is harmony between the two and not equality. What is important is the harmony, which is prevalent in the society. Golwalkar goes on to say that the primary duty of a woman is to take care of her children and rear them in the Hindu way of life; to make them good children with proper Hindu *Samskar* (traditional norms).

In 1937, one woman relative of a RSS worker, Malatibai Kelkar made a request -Why are the men alone doing hard work to 'build the nation '? Let us also contribute. And she was told that RSS was purely a male body and there is no place for women in this male body. What we Hindu men are capable of doing, you women are not. RSS is not open to you. If you also join this who will look after our children? Who will cook?

Now I want to make a point here. While the women were refused entry into RSS, they were advised to form Rashtrasevika Samiti or organisation of female servants of the nation. The issue I'm trying to make is that the male can be self-driven according to Hindutva ideologues (RSS mean National Volunteer's Organisation). **The male can be a volunteer. The**

female can only be a servant. The job of Rashtrasevika Samiti members was to see that their male members in the community, working for RSS, were taken care of. Before I come to BJP Mahila Morcha, which tells us more about the way they look at women, we should make another interesting point. The VHP and other organisations of Sangh Parivar generally propagate that women should not go out and work in the society unless there is a dire need in the family. And one of the best examples I remember is VHP in America. Among the many NRIs, who are top supporters of RSS, one of them was a top woman executive in a bank. Prompted by the RSS's advice, she quit her job to bring up her children in the Hindutva way of life. After a few years she got so frustrated that she went into a mental depression.

Now I shall straight come to the organization called BJP Mahila Morcha. This is a subordinate body of the BJP and I shall draw your attention to one of the interviews given by Mridula Sinha, president of **BJP Mahila Morcha**. This interview appeared in the Telegraph in 1993. I shall put forth a few points from the interview Ms Sinha says:

1 "Well dowry is bad but what can we do? I gave dowry for my daughter and received dowry for my son.

2. Wife beating is bad. But if it has to be done to bring the woman on proper track, it's all right because it is the woman who is wrong in her new home, new situation in life.

3. Women in their own life should not take independent decisions about marriage and other things. The family should take these decisions.

From here I go on to Ms Vijaya Raje Scindia, vice-president of BJP. For many years now she has been a very prominent leader of BJP. Now all of you may remember the Roop Kanwar incident. She was forced to become a sati (burnt on the funeral pyre of her husband). In response to this incident in Rajasthan, there was a good deal of protest from many women's organisations. Ms Scindia went on to say, "Who are these Western-oriented groups who are protesting against the incident, is this Indian tradition?" Not satisfied with that, she led a morcha of women to Parliament in Delhi. The slogan of the morcha was **"to commit sati is a glorious tradition of our Hindu society and those who are opposing this tradition are western-oriented anti-nationals."** I shall quote two more incidents before I say how I understand this game of Hindutva. Take the case of Bhanwari Devi. She was a social worker in Rajasthan. She went from village to village to do reform work like preventing child marriages. Disliking her work, some upper class men raped her. The court acquitted the rapists in due course and they were publicly honoured by one of the branches of

Sangh Parivar. Lastly I come to the most deceitful face of Sangh Parivar in the form of our Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee. In 1990, in one of the interviews to Dharmayug, a Hindi magazine, he says that all those women who want to become equal to men are worth the ridicule. It is a wrong demand on the part of women to be equal to men.

Friends, until now, I put forth before you so many anecdotes simply to show that the way Hindutva wants to deal with women is very, very complex. The gender hierarchy, the superiority of men, which is prevalent in society, is breaking down under different strains. One important factor is women's movement.

Now I will try to draw two analogies in the geographical sense. First from German fascism Hindutva has lot of similarities with German fascism. During the Nazi regime, what was the stand of Hitler about women? Hitler went on to say that German women primarily like to be at home. They love to be mothers and love to take care of their husbands. Here he sounds as if he is talking on behalf of the women but he is basically articulating the demands of a fascist movement to straitjacket, to limit the role of women in a particular society. Therefore he goes on to say that women should primarily be attached to kitchen, church and children.

Secondly, the case of our neighbouring state, Afghanistan, where things are happening right in front of our eyes. Taliban is trying to impose different kinds of restriction on women to control their lives in a very direct and crude way. My basic surmise is that Hindutva is more dangerous than Taliban at one level. Why? In Taliban's case, one can easily make out that they are trying to restrict the space for women. In the case of Hindutva, it is a very, very subtle manoeuvre, a very subtle way of controlling women. On the one hand they are saying that "We demand reservation for women in the Lok Sabha," and on the other the primary identity they want to impose on women is that of a mother. And when you impose this identity as the primary identity, then you are already imposing on her certain restrictions.

From here, if we try to understand whatever we have tried to outline so far, it is clear that different aspects of the life of women are aimed at for being controlled but the language used is modern and the presentation is very refined. I began with some incidents from Manusmruthi. Today it is clear that Manusmurthi cannot be implemented and imposed in the same manner as before. Now the clever Brahminical ploy or the clever Hindutva ploy is to ensure that similar values are brought into the society in a more refined and modernised language.

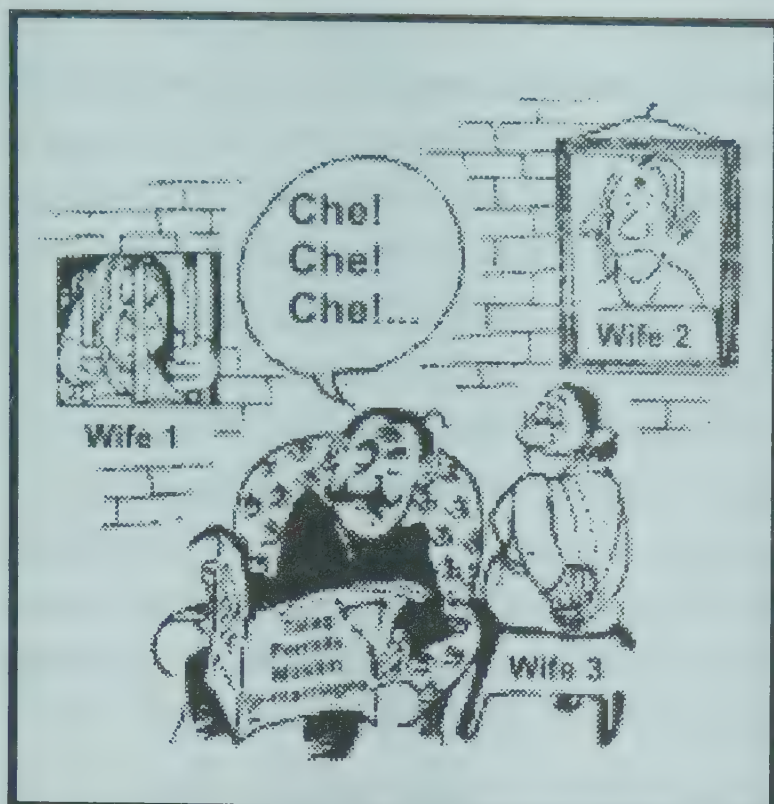
The last point I want to make is this: Initially if you see, women had been the major victims of communal politics, which comes forth in the form of communal violence. Now the picture becomes more complex in today's time. We see some of the middle class sections of women being drawn into the politics of Hindutva not only at a political level but there are also instances where — these women have assisted in communal violence and have helped the communal people in various ways.

As such also if we see, total gender equality does not prevail in the society. There are pulls from both the sides to the type of situation that is prevailing today. On the one hand, we have progressive women's, and liberal movements which strive to see that more rights are brought to women so that they can determine their own lives. On the other, there are factors, which are trying to pull back these efforts striving for gender equality. And I see Hindutva as the most sophisticated way of trying to control the lives of women and to oppose gender equality.

I shall end my talk with an incident in Dadar, Mumbai recently. There was a seminar and the name of that seminar was '*Purush Hakh Protection Samithi*,' meaning 'Seminar for the protection of rights of men'. In that seminar, it was said that women are unnecessarily fighting cases against domestic violence and this should be stopped. This is contrary to the trend where the major cases of violence are against the women. But such attempts are picking up at this point of time to bring pressure on women from different angles and are an ideal foil to the Hindutva.

Dr. Ram Puniyani

Dr. Ram Puniyani is a Mumbai based, an active member of EKTA. He has authored many articles and books on Communalism.



Friends and comrades, I have to talk "Myths about Minorities". Just like Prof. Das and Prof. Punyani, I would also like to start with an example from fascism. Hitler had appointed propaganda officer, whose name was Goebles. Goebles believed that if a lie is spoken a 100 times, then slowly it is accepted as the truth. The fascists in the world have always used lies as a weapon to organize people. A community/race/ethnic group, particularly, the minorities

Myths About Minorities

are given false attributes, each and every individual of the community/race/ethnic group is portrayed to reflect all the characters attributed to the whole Community/race/ethnic group. The community, race or the ethnic group is portrayed as a great danger to the rest of humanity and is made a monster. Then all the individuals of the community, race or the ethnic group become vulnerable and easy targets. Thus targeting the minority community, race or ethnic group, the fascists try to achieve their political objective of crushing democracy under jackboots of military in the garb of wiping out the community, race or ethnic group.

In India, Hindutva has always used lies to organize people to achieve their political objective. Hindutva spreads lies day in and day out against the minorities and then targets them during communal riots. Some members of the majority community, including sections of the poorer sections, working classes backward classes, fall in the trap. When they participate in communal violence or in demolition of places of worship of minority communities, they are able to give a temporary vent to their frustrations and feeling of helplessness and powerlessness do anything about their misery. However, in the long run, their blows are actually directed to trample democracy.

One lie the organisations following Hindutva ideology spread is that Pakistan is a creation of Muslims, and each and every Muslim in the country is responsible for the Partition of the country. They spread this lie throughout their campaign against the Babri Masjid. The slogan they coined then was, *Musalman Ke do hi sthan, Pakistan ya Kabristan* (Muslims have

only two places, Pakistan or burial ground). The slogan suggests that Muslims created Pakistan. Now that they have their own Country, they should go and live there. There cannot be a bigger lie than this. Pakistan is not a creation of all Muslims. It is the creation of certain communal sections of Muslims, representing mainly the elite. However, it is not true that only communal organisations like Muslim League were responsible for the creation of Pakistan. Hindu communal organisations were as much responsible. Role of British colonialists who nurtured and encourages Hindu as well as Muslim communal organisations to counter the freedom movement also cannot be belittled. The Indian historians suppress the fact that the role of Indian Big capitalists represented by Nehru and Vallabh Bhai Patel was indeed the deciding factor in the creation of Pakistan subsequently. Let us look at the role played by the Hindu communal organisations also.

Much before the Muslims League could conceive of the demand of separate homeland for Muslims, as early as in 1923, Savarkar wrote his first treatise on Hindutva. That is, after he was released from the prison upon giving undertaking to the British that he will have no role to play in the freedom movement. Savarkar defined Hindus and Muslims as separate nations. Muslims were a separate nation according to Savarkar because their holy land was not Bharat Mata but outside the fatherland. He argued that culturally and in every way Muslims were separate Muslim League also argued on similar lines. They were in agreement with the Hindutwadis that Muslims and Hindus are separate nation. However, the Muslims League took the argument to its logical conclusion viz., that since we are a separate nation, and a minority at that, we need a geographical territory to survive and to flower as a nation.

The demand of Pakistan was raised by a handful of feudal Nawabs and Muslim elites from UP, Bihar and Central Province who were in hopeless minorities and feared that they may not have any share in the political power and bureaucracy after the transfer of power. But demand for Pakistan found no support amongst the poorer sections of Muslims and even amongst the religious class.

In 1940, at the Lahore Session of Muslim League, about 40,000 Ansari Muslims (Muslims converts from weaving caste) held a demonstration in Delhi opposing the formation of Pakistan soon after the resolution was passed. They maintained the Pakistan was created not in the interest of backward Muslims, but feudal Lords and Nawabs. Except in 1946, the Muslim League could never win a single election on its own in the Muslim majority provinces of undivided India.

In spite of all this, the Sangh Parivar has tried to spread the lie that Pakistan was the creation of all Muslims. They portray all Muslims as pro-Pakistan. In the areas where Muslim population predominates are declared as 'Mini-Pakistan"s. Feelings are aroused against Pakistan and within the Country, the so called mini-Pakistans become easy targets. False propaganda is used every time there is a cricket match between Pakistan and India. Nationalism of each and every Muslim is suspected using Pakistan as a pretext and every Muslim is called upon to prove his patriotism.

Muslims are easily branded as ISI agents because of which, even when BJP was not in power, Congress also carried out several searches in certain Muslim minority areas. In Coimbatore, we have recently witnessed police riots against Muslims. This becomes possible only because we suspect them to be ISI agents. I'm not saying that there is no ISI design at all or there is no ISI network in India. But the entire thing is so exaggerated that even common man today easily suspects every Muslim to be an ISI agent. The only men I recollect who were prosecuted for passing on army secrets to Pakistan or US were not Muslims. If Sangh Parivar is to be believed, Hindus by birth are patriots and will not be 'ISI agents".

BJP boasts that in the states ruled by them, there are no communal riots. That is because once they gain power in a state, they don't need riots anymore. A large scale violence directed against minorities was necessary when they were not in power in order to arouse feelings of the majority community against the minorities. However, once in power, societal violence is not necessary any more to achieve the same objective. The state machinery and the police force can be used to achieve the objective of portraying the minorities as antinational, anti-social etc. In the name of ISI suspects, they can be subjugated without riots.

Another widespread myth propagated by the Sangh Parivar is that Muslims are a pampered minority in this country. The fact is that 95% of the Muslims can be classified as poor and socio-economically backward. Figures of employment of Muslims in public sector reveal that there are only 3.19% Muslims working in this sector. Even in Class IV in the public sector, only 7.93% Muslims are there. These employment figures are on the basis of a survey carried out in 13 states where population of Muslims was 14%. I have figures of Muslims employed in IAS also. Out of 4,195 IAS Officers, only 90 are Muslims, that is, 2.14%. In IPS only 3% are Muslims. And even in giving contract for petrol pumps, giving loans etc, the Muslims are a discriminated minority. Muslims as a community wanting to be governed by a particular set of laws cannot be called appeasement because Hindus, too, have their own privileges. It is not Muslims alone who

have personal laws. Hindus, Christians, Parsis, all have their personal laws. However, there cannot be two opinions on the fact that all the personal laws as they exist, are discriminatory toward women and perpetuate gender inequality. This problem needs to be addressed. Strategically, it will be better to work for reforms within the traditions of each community to achieve the goal of gender just family laws.

The second instance of appeasement given is the constitutional right of minorities to set up their own educational institutions. The Constitutional provision however is that the governments, while granting grants, will not discriminate against institutions run and managed by minorities. In fact, Article 30 also lays down that the government or state will not unduly interfere in institutions managed by minorities. It is not that the majority community has no right to set up its own institutions. The Constitutional guarantee that if the minorities manage their own institutions, the state will not unduly interfere is to enable the minorities to produce and reproduce their own culture and heritage. The minorities defined here are not just religious minorities but includes linguistic and other minorities. The Constitutional fathers did not conceive of a situation where the state would want to interfere with the affairs of institutions run by the majority community and as a result the culture and heritage of the majority will be lost. Thus the Constitutional guarantee to the minorities is not an extra concession.

The other myth connected to Muslim personal law is that Muslims are allowed to have four wives, and because of this their population is multiplying fast. This gives the impression that every Muslim male marries four wives and has about 20 children and they are together a family of 25. The Sangh Parivar tried to create a fear if Muslims multiply so fast, then Hindus will be a minority in this country. Whereas, the fact is that polygamy is practised more amongst Jains, Buddhists, Tribals and Hindus than Muslims. A Survey conducted by government in 1975 shows that polygamy in Tribals was 15%, Buddhists 8%, Jains 7%, Hindus 5.8% and Muslims 5.7%. In any case, for every thousand Muslim males, there are 930 Muslim women. Each Muslim male marrying four wives is just not possible.

It is true that the rate of growth in population is slightly higher in Muslims when compared to Hindus. However, the difference in the rate is very insignificant, and as there is actual gap is further getting narrowed down. For example, as per 1961 census, there were 10.69% Muslims and 20 years later, in 1981, the percentage was 11.73%. So the difference in 20 years is 0.3 or 0.4% Demographers say if present rate of growth continues, it will take millenniums for then Muslims to be majority in this country. This

is on the assumption that the present rate of growth of population does not change. But then there are other factors, which will certainly bring even this rate of growth down.

It should be noted here that the difference in rate of growth of population is not because of the influence of religion nor because Islam prohibits family planning. Muslims do not have an uniform rate of growth in the country. For instance, in Kerala, Muslims are educated and socio-economically better off. Their rate of growth is much less than the rest of the Muslims in the country. In Kashmir, rate of population growth of Hindus is higher than Muslims. Studies have shown that the rate of growth in population is influenced more by the socio-economic reasons. For instance, if the infant mortality rate is very high, irrespective of religion, parents tend to produce more children and shun any suggestions of family planning. Where Health services are better and easily accessible and women have a greater say in the family affairs, the rate of growth of population is much lower. Thus family planning is function of variety of socio-economic factors rather than of religion alone. The rate of population growth of population of Muslims can be compared to that of Dalits because of similar socio-economic conditions the two share.

The last myth is that Muslims are by and large criminals. If you see Muslims living in rural areas, most of them are artisans. One can hardly conceive of a hard working artisan from rural area to indulge in criminal activity. Crime is more a urban phenomena. Those who are pushed onto the margins of industrialized and rapidly growing, ruthless society, find it hard to accept the social and legal norms set out by religions when they and their children are hungry. While a tiny section of the society is making to go high up in the ladder, those below are pushed further below or even off the ladder.

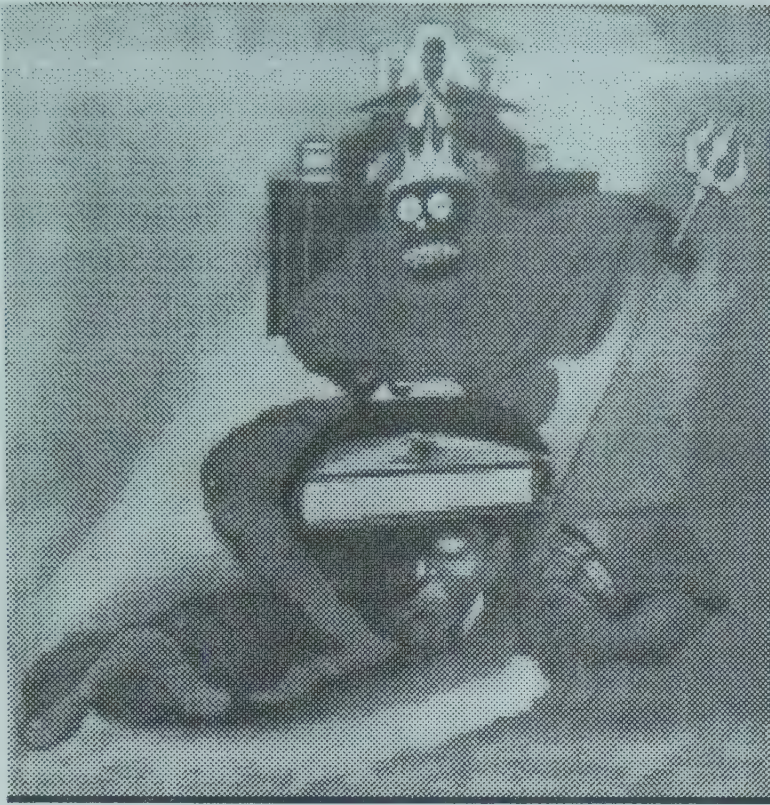
The gap between the socially well off and marginalized section is widening beyond imagination. Traditions change faster than one can adjust to. These factors along with rising unemployment gives rise to legitimacy of criminal activities in the eyes of a section. Muslims are by and large amongst the poorer and marginalized sections in the urban areas. They find difficult to get employment due to discrimination all around. Hence, a section of Muslims do join the criminal force and their proportion in the activities might be a little more than their population may warrant. However, they are by and large on the lower rungs of the criminal gangs- the labour force of the criminal gangs as it were. Those who control the criminal activities are actually economic elite. Viz., the builders, the land sharks, etc., There is a fair nexus with the politicians also.

Despite this fact, the presence of Muslims in the criminal gangs has been highly exaggerated in the common perception thanks to the media and the police who nurture their own biases against them. For ever Dawood Ibrahim, there are numerous Chhota Rajans, Sharmas, Arun Gawlis, which we tend to ignore, or rather whose community we tend to ignore.

Thank you.

Irfan Ali Engineer

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What has been the attitude of the Indian media to the growth of Hindu communalism, perhaps the most important socio-political development of the decade of the nineties? The Indian media is a mixed bag: there is the vernacular and English media traditions, there is a press and electronic media tradition, and within all these are represented a heterogeneity of ideologies, ownership patterns, and so on. The press tradition is by far the

Communalism in the Current Context

older tradition, and the more independent one as it was born during the freedom movement and was shaped by its ideals. The electronic tradition is much younger, and having been started after Independence, tended to be a government controlled medium until the advent of various channel television networks.

During the early nineties, as Hindutva registered its first dramatic spurt of growth as a political force, the English media tradition, by and large, stood opposed to the ideology and practice of Hindutva, and defended the idea of secularism which is central to the vision of the Indian state that is enshrined in the constitution. Sections of the vernacular press, particularly in those states where the Sangh Parivar had influence, sided with the anti-minorities platform of the Sangh Parivar (for example the larger part of the Hindi press during the Ayodhya movement acted as vehicles for Hindutva propaganda).

With the premier party of the Hindu Right now in power at the centre, and somewhat circumscribed by the fact of having to share power with other, non-Hindutva parties, there has been a shift of attitude within the English media towards the BJP. There are worrying trends emerging within the media, those that downplay the fundamentally anti-democratic and anti-minorities platform of the Sangh Parivar, as seen in the press response to the full scale assault on the Christian minorities in different states of the country by the various groups within the Sangh Parivar. In Karnataka, for example, where the Bajrang Dal actually announced a month-long cam-

paing of intimidation and terror against convent schools in July 1998, and then brazenly went ahead with their plans, the media with a few exceptions ignored the shocking attack by the Bajrang Dal on nuns in several small towns in the State. This was not the sort of response shown by the media in the early nineties, when there were a spate of communal attacks on the muslim minority before and after the demolition of the Babri Masjid. At that time the media documented these incidents in great detail and condemned them in their editorials.

The challenge posed by fundamentalism to society in general and women and the women's movement in particular, during the 90's has acquired a qualitatively new dimension. The chief organiser of this platform is the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh or RSS with its affiliates like the Viswa Hindu Parishad, the Bajrang Dal, the Durga Vahini, the Adivasi Sangh and others, known collectively as the Sangh Parivar. Now that the representatives of Hindutva have captured political power, it has a platform and strength far ahead of any other religio-fundamentalist groups in the country. The goal which the Hindu Right set itself a decade ago, that of coming to power at the centre, has come to fruition. In this it has had the backing of the major section of India's elite classes, of big business and large property owners, who see in this platform the possibilities of stability and their growth. To achieve this end the Sangh Parivar has had to make some tactical compromises in respect of accommodating political parties which do not share its Hindutva agenda. But power-sharing has not come in the way of its vigorous pursuit of its sectarian and anti-minority ideological agenda. Communal violence against a particular community may take the form of rioting, looting, murder, burning of houses, rape and sexual abuse of women. It can also take other, less overt forms. The channels for its growth are many more as it has institutionalised its agenda through control over the state apparatus.

In 1992, after the preplanned demolition of the Babri Masjid and the accompanying violence against minority Muslim communities in large parts of the country, a joint fact finding team of women's organisations visited several of the affected centres. It later published its report. The introduction stated "At no time since Independence has there been such a challenge to the very basis of India's secular polity, its Constitution and its democratic institutions. Communalism is not now just another issue to be discussed and debated in seminars and conferences. It is the central issue in the struggle for women's rights which is linked to every other issue we raise. The women's movement can ignore this reality only at the cost of its own existence."

Its record in office has already shown beyond any doubt what Hindutva in power can do to the institutions of democracy and to civil society. On assuming power the Sangh Parivar began a campaign against alleged forced conversions by Christian missionaries of poor Hindu's. This soon led to intimidation and physical attacks against Christians by the goondas of the Saffron Brotherhood. In one year there were 626 incidents of a communal nature in which 207 people were killed and another 2000 were injured. There were incidents of attacks/ threats/ rapes against men and women belonging to religious minorities (Christians in particular). In January 1999 alone, there were nine such incidents. The largely tribal district of Dangs in BJP-controlled Gujarat saw a slew of attacks against Christians in the last two months of 1998. Christian Churches and schools were burnt, congregations attacked and priests and nuns beaten up. The police were in most cases silent bystanders and BJP governments and their supporters were buoyed by the Prime Minister's reaction —to ask for a national debate on conversions! The anti-Christian hate campaign which spread rapidly across the country —to Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh, and Karnataka, saw its most savage manifestation in Orissa, where Bajrang Dal criminals set afire Graham stains, an Australian social worker and his two little boys. Home Minister L.K. Advani was quick to give a good conduct certificate to the Bajrang Dal. This certainly influenced the conclusion of the Wadhwa Commission report on the murder. While the evidence before the Commission clearly showed that Dara Singh, the main accused, was closely connected with the Sangh Parivar through his leadership of the local Gau Raksha Samiti (a wing of the Bajrang Dal) the Commission concluded that the murder was just the work of an individual. State patronage to such hate campaigns was again witnessed during the recent visit of Pope John Paul II when the central government permitted the Viswa Hindu Parishad to organise a Rath Yatra, in protest against alleged Catholic conversions.

Nuns, the most vulnerable section in the hierarchy of the Christian Church, have become a special target of attack by the Sangh Parivar. The protectors of women's virtue and chastity have no compunction in raping, spitting at, or urinating in the mouths of defenceless women. In not one of these cases of violence against nuns did the BJP in power seek to identify the culprits and bring them to book. The blame for the rape of four nuns in September last year near Jhabua village in Madhya Pradesh presumably by activists or sympathisers of the Parivar, was deftly put on "Christian youth"; the one month campaign of intimidation and violence against convent schools by the Vishva Hindu Parishad in Karnataka in July 1998 did not even make it to the pages of the mainstream newspapers; and the recent

case of a gang of Parivar men terrorising a nun and forcing her to drink urine in Bihar passed with no reaction from the government.

It is with the full knowledge of the tacit support that BJP governments will extend them, that the various Sangh Parivar outfits play the role of moral policemen. In Randhikpur village in Gujarat, for example, VHP and Bajrang Dal squads forced 400 Muslim residents to leave the village in June 1998, an act of collective reprisal after two Muslim youth eloped with Hindu girls. The police stood by and watched as independent fact-finding teams and journalists visiting Randhikpur were attacked.

The Gujarat government has set a record for its blatant Hinduisation of governance. Following the Randhikpur incident it set up a committee to accord permission for all intercommunity marriages. Ostensibly to prevent "forced" marriages, its real objective was to stop all inter-religious marriages of choice. Similarly, in a truly Nazi system of surveillance, the same government asked its police department to undertake a separate census of Christians and Muslims living in the state. It has now come up with a draft Bill against so-call forced conversions.

The BJP-Shiv Sena government in Maharashtra used its official machinery to shield those responsible for the murder of thousands of Muslim men, women and children in the 1992 Bombay riots. The Srikrishna Commission's findings are a clear indictment of the roles played by Bal Thakeray, other Shiv Sena politicians, some BJP leaders and the Mumbai police. The government first tried to suppress the report, and then when forced to release it called its contents "one-sided". It is over a year since the report was released; yet not a single case has been filed against the perpetrators of the communal carnage.

The BJP government is set on fulfilling its ideological commitment to Hindutva, and will do it through whatever means it has at its disposal. The BJP has retained control of the critical ministries of culture, education and information, and has already made a series of appointments of men and women who share the RSS vision into key functional bodies. The rewriting of textbooks; the anti-science, a liberal and anti-modern thrust of changes sought to be made in syllabi- content; these are matters of grave concern. Educational bodies such as the Indian Council of Historical Research, the Indian Council of Social Science Research, the Indian Institute of Advanced Studies, the National Institute of Planning, the National Council of Research and Training, and the Prasad Bharati Board to name but a few, have been filled with sympathisers or activists of the Sangh Parivar. A truly shocking appointment has been that of Professor Rastogi, an RSS activist, and self confessed murderer, to the selection board of the NCERT by the Human

Resources Minister, Murli Manohar Joshi. This gentleman confessed in his biography to having murdered a young Muslim woman in Delhi during the Partition riots. Rastogi says that a group of Hindu rioters (who were with him) were going to rape a Muslim woman, forgetting "their mission". In an act of "mercy", Rastogi decided to shoot her. The thought that he should train his gun on those who were ready to rape an innocent woman never struck this loyal RSS Pracharak. This Professor will now decide on appointments to the NCERT of those who will have the responsibility, among other things, of writing textbooks for children. One can imagine the criteria on which his selections will be made.

The earlier BJP-led governments of Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh have already undertaken a major textbook re-writing project. The school texts in these two states reflect, among other things, the RSS worldview on the family and the position of women. Practices such as sati and child marriage are endorsed, while rituals and outmoded traditions are invested with meaning and significance for women. Manu is given an exalted status and his prescriptions for women are justified on the grounds of the defence of Hindu tradition. In short the RSS vision for women, as transmitted to young children through textbooks, militates against everything that the democratic women's movement has fought for.

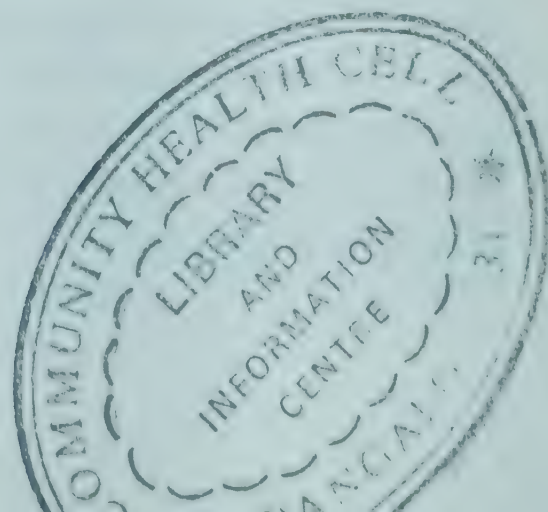
There is ample documentary evidence to show that women are the worst affected during communal violence. Often when the aim is to humiliate a whole community, the central target becomes the woman -she is seen as the property of the community, the repository of its self-respect, its purity. We have often seen this happening during caste conflicts. As punishment or reprisal against a particular caste (usually a lower caste) its womenfolk are made to parade naked, or raped.

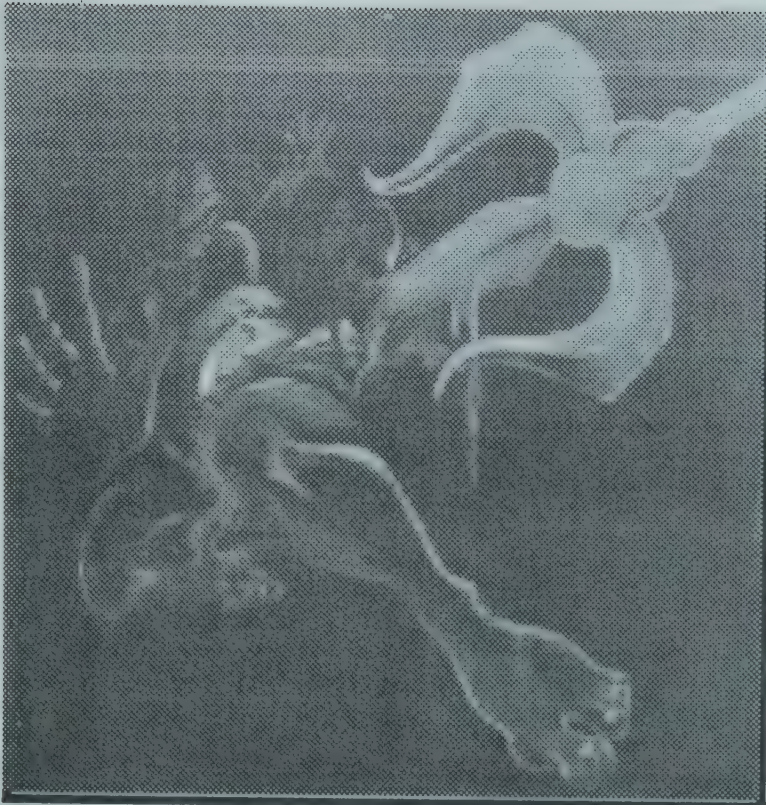
The media remains a powerful tool that can expose the actions and the ideology of Hindutva, indeed of any fundamentalist creed. It is of deep concern that the media too is softening its stance towards this most dangerous social force of our time.

Parvathi Menon

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Even the memory of some trauma caused by communalism in women's lives is enough for any sensitive human being to shed tears of anger and take a pledge to struggle against it.

As in many other issues even in this the reality is much worse than the worst of our imagination. Communalism affects women in many ways. Women are the direct and indirect victims of communal-

Communal Violence On Women And The Responsibility Of Women's Movement

ism. Women are used as a medium to promote communal violence, they are caught further into the web of patriarchal domination due to communal ideology and propaganda, and as the environment is communalised there is an increase in the Muslim and Christian fundamentalist control, in turn targeting the women of those communities etc. let us see how each of this aspect is reflected in society in some detail.

Everything in the name of protecting the women's honour

In every instance of communal riot women are insulted, threatened, beaten up, raped and killed. What happened in Surat during December 1992 and January 1993 and in Bombay in January 1993 as also the whole gamut of unpalatable most cruel episodes in Gujarat stand a witness to this fact. Even in individual context rape is not just an act of devilish lust alone. It springs from the concept of viewing women as objects of pleasure and is a despicable depiction of man's power over women. In social context rape assumes a clear political meaning and in instances of organized communal aggression rape is an act of celebration-victory over the symbol of honour of the enemy community. In a society based on patriarchal and communal values women are considered the property of men and thereby the community. Hence an attack on women and rape of women is treated by the communalists as a physical and psychological victory over the enemy community

In Surat not only were women raped but they were also subjected to very cheap sexual harassment. It is said that women in large numbers were gathered under floodlight, stripped naked, and even videoed and shown around at that. The celebration often ended by killing the women or by inserting iron rods into their private parts. At the time of death these unfortunate women were compelled to repeat 'Jai Sriram' the war slogan of the Hindutva hooligans. (Compare this with the hail Hitler of nazi fascist regime) if some people were done to death with daggers, some were burnt alive. On the hands and private organs of many people ohm was inscribed as akin to swastik symbol of the Nazis and even the name of the criminals along with the date was etched. A girl in Patiala went to the extent of burning her entire hand with acid in order to erase the mark of these despots over her hand.

If one thinks that Surat was the limit, NO, what the communalists resorted to in Gujarat has no parallel in our history. It was such a shame on the whole country. Pregnant women, children and old alike were raped en masse in mid street, fetuses were ripped apart And stabbing to death, throwing them all into fire, looting houses, destroying property belonging to Muslims, wiping out whole families, driving away entire community from many villages...the orgy went on and on in full glory obvious to all. It was in the name of restoring the honour of Hindu women who were said to have been abducted and disfigured etc., etc., it was a rumour deliberately set afloat by the very same Hindutva gangsters. In fact the Godhra story as narrated by Sangh Parivar was a terrible concoction as has come to light later. The Gujarat genocide was aided by the administration. The police were actively involved. The state government with Modi at its head encouraged and indulged in horrific crimes, as the center stood to bless it with both hands. After almost two years now the helpless cries of thousands of children and women are still reverberating. Wounds such as those of the survivors of these unspeakable crimes cannot ever heal. There is no relief. Crimes such as these are not possible by people who call themselves human beings.

Things do not stop at this. Gujarat was only a huge experiment in the Hindutva agenda. More can be expected. These despicable actions are justified as those committed in the interest of innocent Hindu women. Myths such as Muslims are lustful violent polygamous, Hindus are tolerant, respect women as goddesses etc are systematically created, developed and spread across. Muslim rule in India has been projected as one in which Hindu women have undergone untold sufferings in the hands of evil Muslim men. In contrast much wool is spun to prove what a respectable and independent life Indian women (Bharathiya nari) enjoyed prior to Muslim

aggression. Listen to the RSS ideologist Savarkar's words 'rape in itself is not a crime. In fact it is a weapon in the war against Muslims. Without taking into count the time, place, person and situation to consider it as morally ill would be a vulgarisation. This has been the reason for the insult and defeat of Hindu nation". Thus whatever the nature and extent of communal violence today against Muslim women it is coolly described as revengeful acts for the so called crimes perpetrated by Muslims in history including those at the time of Indo-Pak partition. They are held aloft as the fury of gods. According to their ideology as all Muslims lack character, their women also have no morals and are lustful. Hence it is argued that they do not deserve any respect whatsoever.

Even in patriarchal society there is no overt acceptance to rape. Though rape is an everyday occurrence there is no ideology to justify its necessity. Here we have to note that even this has been made possible through a communal mindset consciously built by communal gangsters.

Women's lives permanently ruptured by communal violence

Communal violence affects the marginalised sections of the society most. Poor Muslim, Christians and Dalits constantly lose their means of survival due to it. Whether in Surat, Bombay, Gujarat or in Bangalore riots around Urdu news- even minimum means of livelihood such as pushcarts, tailoring machines, petty shops in street corners etc were deliberately destroyed, hutments were burnt down, men were handicapped with hands and legs severed, children were orphaned, people were threatened, chased out of their homes and overturning the entire scenario in area overnight, the communalists conducted their deathly blood ridden wars. The purpose is to create fear and to establish their hegemony. And not just that to deprive the minority of any property and rid the poor of their shelter is in their agenda. During communal riots small and big shops belonging to Muslims and even industries were looted and destroyed. The Marwari Bania community and real estate agents who fund these riots profit the most after every such destruction.

In all this women are threatened and helpless as they are thrown into streets. Women who are left alone are identified and attacked. Next pimps enter the scene to drag the deserted destitute women into prostitution. Poor women and men suffer much and get caught in the suicidal web of loans and interests.

Women utilised to promote communal violence

Let us leave aside the diabolic role played by people like Sadhvirithambara, Umabharathi etc in intensifying the communalisation of

the society. Their identity is more as to what exploitative class and communal ideology they respect than as women. But we cannot neglect the mass communalization of a certain section of the middleclass women who are being towards the RSS_BJP combine. When hundreds of women volunteers took part in the demolition of Babri Masjid magazines and some women's organisations reacted saying "this indicates to what extent the society has been criminalised" etc. but we need to understand the participation of women in communal activities from a different standpoint.

Feudal patriarchy has always utilized religion for exercising control on women. Women have been constantly involved in such activities as poojas, vrathas and festivals etc due to backward consciousness and lack of opportunity to obtain a comprehensive understanding regarding their oppressed status, patriarchy and state or a way out of any of it, women have been all along tending to believe in a host of Gods and Godmen, freaks and what not, seeking a way out of their everyday desperations.

As problems multiply they revolve around varied temples and superstitions also all the more. The VHP-BJP combine is forever engaged in building new temples, renovating old ones, in conducting yagnas and arthis etc., etc., in all this women especially those from upper caste, upper class background are accorded a special role. Women who have otherwise been sidelined or neglected take a pride in all this. Apart from these organizations such as Shivsena, Durga Vahini and such others conduct nurseries, (Shishu Vihars), noon meal schemes and also many other conservative functions on a regular scale. Women are offered a primary role in all this. Their concept of 'children of the nation' gets extended to women as well as 'mothers of the children of the nation', giving a certain twist to the patriarchal ideology of service and sacrifice as the only goal of women in life the upholders of Hindutva instead define and explain service as not just service to individual man in the family alone but as service to Hindu men who are fighting for the oppressed and injured Hindu nation. They portray the nation as woman, Bharath Mata and any insult to nation as insult to woman etc. women who are denied any identity are thereby provided an identity of society, nation etc. Thus women who are limited to a narrow space and mechanical lives with little opportunity to step out of their confinement are now provided with some space in outside world. And not only that such participation of women in communal functions and activities is permitted by the concerned religious and community heads. Since this social role of women is only a furtherance of their submissive role in the family and in fact contributes to an increase in their surrendering attitude in family affairs there is an acceptance to the same from the family members too. Commu-

nalists involve women as they are in their activities for their own purpose without ever seeking to oppose the patriarchal oppressive family institutions or fight for any reforms in the hard lives of women. (Compare this with the opposition that women have to face from family and immediate community or even society if they desire to fight for their rights or fight against patriarchal norms either individually or organizationally) utilizing their social status and search for some identity communal propaganda and activity further grills the women staunchly into their existing reactionary patriarchal mould.

Communalism in the service of patriarchy

Communalism portrays women; yes only Hindu women, as goddesses and great mothers. This is only to deny them an equal status in human society. Symbols of surrender of women such as 'sindhoor', 'red bangles', 'mangal sutra', 'silk saree' etc are glorified as proud symbols of our cultural heritage. These symbols, which had reduced to an extent due to the influence of women's movement and other progressive social and cultural movements, have acquired a status again owing to the platform provided by communalism. Even the hotels in south Delhi celebrates 'karwa chouth' for a whole week, which is a feudal practice wherein the woman has to fast for the long life of the husband. Women MPs like Sushma Swaraj often appear in TV with a big 'kumkum' and 'Bharathiya naris' make up advising about 'pathi vratha dharma' etc. if these are the means to push woman one step back in the name of Indian culture there are also efforts to drive them back to dark ages

Right from Rajasthan Roop kanwars infamous 'sati' the Hindu revivalists have been strongly justifying many sati's. They have built sati platforms and held sati festivals. The 'past glory' of great womanhood is celebrated. As a consequence we can find women steeped in poverty and feudal culture participate in processions for the right to become sati. These processions were organised by BJP's Mahila morcha.

People like Puri Shankaracharya are upholding and reviving the oppressive customs of traditional religious prostitution. According to these poor women, who are socially bifurcated as basavis, jogis, parvathis, devadasis, devakis, and nandhinis etc are married to 'god', as per Hindu tradition. In reality this 'puritan' religious prostitution practices only push poor exploited women mainly from Dalit communities to serve as pleasure tools for all men in 'Hindu' society and live at their mercy.

In the reform action of the BJP government, with relation to education, suggestions to make 'home management' a compulsory course for girls and thereby further widen gender-inequality is included. In states where

BJP is in power such reactionary education plans have been implemented. At an age where ones dreams about what ones life should be is formulated, when girls are taught on sub themes such as 'individual development', 'how to make the husband happy', 'cooking and cleaning' etc., they become the most important aspects in life. These young minds are diverted from the creative abilities, deprived of their self-confidence and self-respect and trained towards being a traditional 'Hindu' Woman. Since they are diverted from higher goals and any attention on larger social, economic and political issues, they lack social consciousness. As per Hindu customs, a girl has to get married at a young age. With that she gets limited to 'Home Management'. The reactionary, communal organisations declare that the sole aim of women's education is to educate her children. They claim that one of the important causative factors behind unemployment lies in women going up for jobs. Through this, if on the one hand they decry economic independence to women, on the other by saying that women are grabbing the jobs, they create an undue cleavage between needy men and women, on this score.

Another anti-women communal action proposed by BJP Government is to avoid death sentence to rapists. On the one hand Vishwa Hindu Parishad, of the Sangh Parivar justified the rape of nuns in Babua, Madhya Pradesh. In Banwari Devi's case, where the caste and class alliance of VHP and Sangh Parivar as such lay clearly exposed, VHP even went to the extent of honoring the rapists. In Gujarat, rapists in great arrogance are allowed to continue the show while victims are compelled to hide in fear. On the other Advani declares that, "the government has taken a stand to provide the maximum punishment for rape. (If this is true, then Modi, Togadia, Advani and others who have been directly and indirectly responsible for the rape of thousands of women should be first sent to the gallows). Actually this is only yet another conspiracy to control womens' lives further. It will add to the anxiety about rape, and bring pressure on women to somehow prevent it from occurring. In order to avoid men from being accused of rape, more restrictions on women, such as 'compulsory dress code, 'compulsory assistance of men for protection purposes', night curfew, etc., are a possibility with such a fascist government. The current reality is that in all instances of rape, patriarchal notions are the prime reason for the same. Even as rape is a non-bailable offence, rapists are left free on bail. And ultimately, most are not convicted on the grounds that there is no witness or there is not enough evidence, etc. If the sentence is enhanced to death, with no attempt to curb the crime, not crime but only convictions will further come down. Women's organizations have consistently fought for changes in rape laws but apart from loopholes in the laws,

even the implementation of existing laws is poor. If there is no effort even to improve the situation, when this is the case such sudden concern and strong declarations against rape and rapists indicates nothing but the BJP government's cunningness and orthodoxy. To top it all two years ago, the BJP Govt. also dared to turn rape as an accident against which women could take an Insurance cover, thus adding insult to injury.

The women's wings of Sangh Parivar mobilises 'dowry' for women in need. In order to protect the peace at home, (that is to retain the domination of Hindu men) they say that women have to tolerate domestic violence. They oppose divorce and widow remarriage.

The Sangh Parivar imposes its undemocratic dictatorship over many films. It could be 'Paniamma' which depicted widow's plight, or 'Bandit Queen' as the rapists were from upper caste, or 'Fire' that despite its limitations did raise some pertinent questions regarding patriarchal family structure and religion. It even prevented the filming of 'Water' by Deepa Mehta, which sought to expose the pitiable state of widows in 'holy' Vrindavan and the prostitution racket that lies at its undercurrent. These films met with protests, hooliganism and demands for banning, all in the name of 'defending Indian culture and opposing obscenity'.

For long, women's organisations had been criticising the discrimination and injustice on women under personal laws. They had placed a just, democratic demand for a common, egalitarian civil code instead. The BJP-RSS combine has systematically suppressed this demand by pressing forward its agenda for a 'uniform civil code', which is in essence nothing but a reactionary code in the place of personal laws.

This is communalism with its patriarchal content for you. It throws up fire and dung to burn and bury many women's rights obtained through hard labour by women in struggle.

Communalism is responsible for the increase in fundamentalism and its hold on women in minority communities.

Majority Hindu code, and all other personal laws, whether Muslim, Christian or Sikh, etc. are based on the religious texts and without providing scope for any progressive aspects continue to remain anti-women. They have been so constructed to preserve and promote the existing unequal family and state structures with their deep patriarchal value base. All personal laws desire to hold women under their thumb. Hence in the name of religion they intensely restrict women's rights in various fundamental issues of their lives, be it marriage or divorce, etc.

In 70s, with the development of women's movement, these personal

laws were also seriously countered. Demand for a just common civil code without any gender discrimination came forward. Demands were placed against the cunning operations of religion and its control on women's lives. With the support of progressive organisations, pressure was also built within the minority communities for reforms in personal laws. But before it could proceed further, the Hindu communal politics, which has woven the society's identity around religion, gained an upper hand. It is aimed at reestablishing the hold of religion over the entire society and destroying all progressive aspirations of women and people on the whole. As a result of the influence and imposition of communalization of all levels, the lives of women in minority communities have turned even more narrow and blind and this is reflected in the following three aspects:

a) Most of the progressives and democrats within these communities have been compelled to turn silent or justify the religious practices of their community, however unjust they may be, in the face of the live danger of the imposition of the Hindu Civil Code.

b) Due to communal violence and threat, women especially the poor have had no choice but to depend on the religious institutions for their social security and some economic support.

c) The grip of fundamentalists and religious leaders on women began to increase with this. They came to utilize the situation to reassert their power. The adverse reaction of the Muslim fundamentalists to Shah Bano issue and the growing stress on Shariat and restrictions based on it on women's conduct, mobility, dress, etc. are only indications to the same.

Thus, we have to counter the religious fundamentalism in minority communities; we need to first begin it with an active propaganda and struggle against Hindu communalism, which is kindling it.

The responsibility of the women's movement:

All the aspects described above clearly underline the fact that communalism is not just another issue, that women's movement needs to pay heed to. It is an important matter on which the women's organisations have to in fact concentrate their attention. Women from different communities have to be mobilized to fight communalism. Communalism is a double-edged sword. On the one hand, it oppresses women's rights, on the other it overtly and covertly tries to nullify even the existing minimum rights and confine women within dark narrow space as per their dictates. All women have to necessarily become conscious of this reality. Women's organiza-

tions need to strengthen their resistance. Here it is necessary to pay attention to a few important factors:

1. Even some activists and members of the Women's organisations were attracted towards 'Ram Janma Bhoomi Rath Yatra' call. In some this also led to a division in the organisation at various levels. It is because there was a lack of political education to members in these organisations that the communalists could so succeed in bringing about our division within them. Many women's organisations have limited their activists to struggle against some direct forms of patriarchal violence alone. Here patriarchy is grasped superficially, more as the active violence by a man within the family alone and the deep and live links of patriarchy with Religion and State are not analysed. Hence even members and activists of various organisations continue to retain their wrong concepts towards their own religion and community and an attitude of identifying themselves with their religion persists. To add to it are the widespread, deep-rooted, prejudices sown by the Hindutva Ideologists and religious heads. As a consequence communalism easily finds friends even amongst those who otherwise possess a democratic consciousness. It grows right within the very people it seeks to oppress. There are even women's organisations, which have been completely hijacked by communalists. In a context where communalism is fast spreading amongst various castes and classes of women and even seeping through into women's organisations, we need to quickly learn lessons from our mistakes and drawbacks. Gujarat genocide and loot underline this cruel fact. We need to struggle against communalism without compromise. We have to work very hard to free women from the bonds of religion and caste.

It is no doubt right to view the role of religion in women's lives with empathy but at the same time we cannot neglect to raise the consciousness of women by making them understand the reactionary role of religion. We need to be more sensitive and sensitise others as well to the indictments and sufferings faced by women in minority communities. Special stress has also to be laid in involving and unifying with minority women in the struggle against communalism and other issues of common interest.

There is yet another disturbing phenomenon in women's organizations triggered on account of attacks on minority. Even democratic women's organizations within the fold of minority communities have been fighting against the Shariat and retrogressive religious rules, systems and practices and some minority women in other general women's organizations are moving towards religious fundamentalism. They have begun to extend support to the same people whom they earlier considered as their opponents without criticism now. If this is on the one hand, a reaction to Hindu communal aggression, and as a result of falling a prey to

the fundamentalist for maintaining one's distinct cultural identity as a religion and community it is on the other the offshoot of insecurity and fear produced by communal terrorism. Women of the minority community should grow aware of the dangers behind this process. It will only aid to promote and intensify the oppression on us. Without ever compromising on our interests we need to fight for all our rights along with an active fight against communalism.

2. Yet another aspect that we need to understand here is that communalism is a fascist political and economic programme. It is not just the handiwork of a few individuals and organizations alone. Historically fascism has been more clearly visible under times of intense economic crisis. It bases itself on people's disillusionment and backward consciousness. Communalism grows by diverting the peoples attention from the elite class and state that is actually responsible for the crumbling lives of the people, by instead pointing the finger at another coexisting minority community as the one responsible for the same, and by deliberately igniting the conflict between the two with the indication that the solution lies in the destruction of the minority community. Hence communalism is a planned agenda of the exploiting class and state. It is a convenient tool for repressing the growing resistance against the states anti people policies. A fascist state is nothing but a dictatorship that governs by flouting all democratic norms. Compare this with what is happening here. Intense crisis-and more and more people thrown into streets. All policies favour the propertied classes, the imperialists and the feudal lords. An open opportunity has been provided to loot all natural resources and labour of the people. At one end problems are multiplying. At another the struggles of women/people against the exploiters is strengthening. All parliamentary parties, whether it be BJP, Congress, Janatha or whatever, and the exploiting classes that they in fact represent directly and indirectly support and practice the fascist methods. Hence any woman's organisation that is seriously involved in a struggle against communalism should necessarily struggle against the exploitative system/state that is nurturing it. And if we do not place communalism and women's oppression in the broad overall framework and understand the irrevocable relations between the two, if we fight them in isolation from one another it will only lead us to defeat ultimately.

It is the imperative need of today to face communalism at ideological and practical level. It is the urgent responsibility of every woman's organisation to educate its activists regarding the dangerous politics of communalism, to raise the consciousness of all oppressed women, to unite with minority women, to join hands with all democratic forces in struggle, and formulate the necessary tactics and strategy to combat communalism.

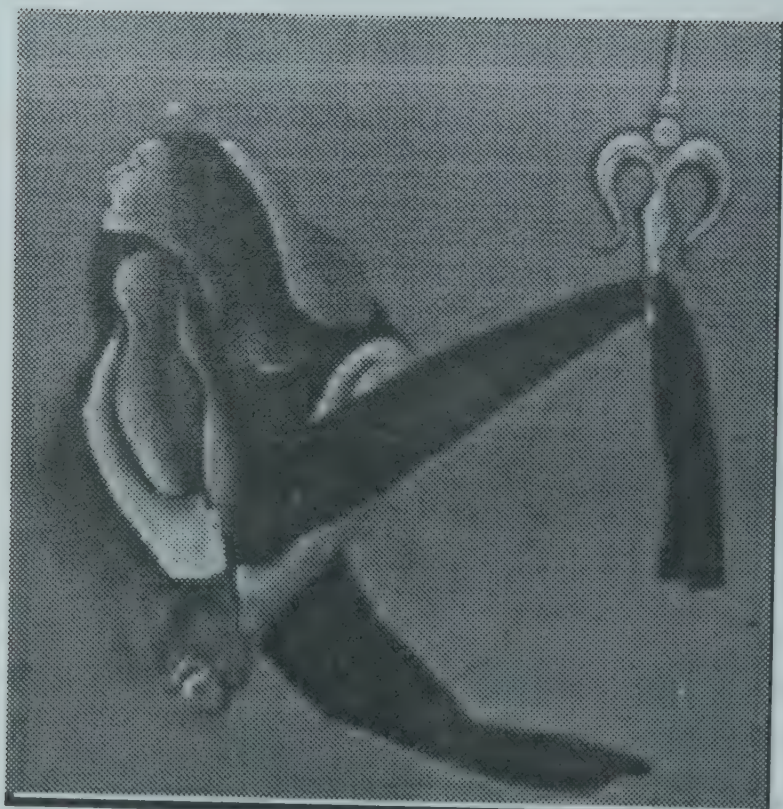
Lalitha

Lalitha is a psychiatric counselor. She is a founder member and activist of Mahila Jagruthi

Annexure – I

Friends,

Not 'Suicide Squads' but killer squads are on the move towards Bababudangiri with the professed aim of 'converting' the Darga there into 'Datta Peeta'.



Women and Communalism

They scheme for yet another Raktha Yatra as Anantkumar Hegde the BJP MP for Uttar Kannada says with Impunity that "Datta Peeta" will be liberated even if the events there assumes the intensity that events did at Ayodhya. The statement comes close to December 6th, the day Babri Masjid was demolished six years ago. The Land is still wet and aching with all the blood that was forced out of poor innocent victims, the majority of whom were from the minority Muslim Community, in the aftermath of Ayodhya incident.

With BJP in power, RSS- the communal mastermind, along with it's varied 'avatars' of VHP, Bajrang Dal, Shiv Sena etc., are freely laying bare their ugly teeth and nail. Their frenzied call for a "Hindu Rashtra" is sought to be strengthened with the most unscrupulous interventions in the crucial spheres of Education, History, Culture and Politics, along with a series of communal monstrosities beyond imagination.

Last fortnight U.P. Government made it mandatory for all school students to recite 'Hindu' prayers of Saraswathi Vandana and Vande Mataram. A good deal of communal material has been included in textbooks. Communalists are advocating incorporation of Vedas and Upanishads into basic curriculum. They want Sanskrit learning to be made obligatory between class III and X. They speak of Moral and Spiritual learning, inculcating desirable social and national values, the ulterior motive of which is to poison the minds of the young in favour of their fascist ideology. It is advised that high school girls be given training in 'Home

Keeping'. Girls are prescribed to wear bindi, flowers and customary dressed. In order to enforce measures such as these there has been increased attacks, desecration, harassment and intimidation on Christian Institutions and Individuals running the same. Control over the sphere of education is sought both as a cultural measure to indoctrinate communal ideology and also as it has a viable business prospect. Christian Institutions in Karnataka have been issued a warning which instructs them to quickly 'Hinduise' their Schools or face the consequences. BJP has also mooted an amendment to Section 30 of the Constitution that guarantees minority institutions the right to preserve their religious and cultural identity.

And then efforts are going on to saffronise even the existing ruling class history the reference point being Brahminic Vedas, Upanishads and the glorification of rulers and their choices. Having retained all the key ministries such as Human Resource Development, Information and Broadcasting and Home department to itself, the RSS-BJP combine has drastically reconstituted the Indian Council of Historical Research (ICHR), Indian Council for Research in Social Sciences (ICSSR), Indian Council of Philosophical Research and Indian Institute of Advanced Studies etc., filling them with their own dubious historians and archaeologists. In the name of 'Nationalism Religious Fanatism and Cultural Chauvinism' is sown in both Army- Police personnel and common people through 'History shows' which are nothing but a falsification of facts.

T.V. constantly churns out serials such as 'Jai Hanuman', 'Om Namashivay', 'Sri Krishna.... And those said to highlight 'our' cultural heritage. Every one of these contain retrogressive messages, stress on the cultural sub-ordination of women in Family and Society, entrench irrational notions. Superstitions and rituals that oppress women revived and revered.

Anti- Muslim propaganda has been intensified by the Hindu Communalists through the state and its media. An anti-Pak hysteria whipped up as and when necessary. The struggling people of Kashmir are reeling under the most severe repression with BJP's blessings. With Advani, one of the prime culprits of communal violence as Home Minister, most cases against Hindu Communalists are being dropped. At the same time whether in Bombay, Surat, Hyderabad or Coimbatore thousands of Muslim Youth have been arrested and tortured under black laws from which they have no recourse to normal life.

Communal violence is growing unabated with the active connivance of the Government, Police, Law and administration. Every opportunity is utilized and new ones created day after day to harass, loot, victimize and terrorise the people belonging to Muslim and Christian communities. A

large number of them are poor Muslim or Dalit Christians who have no access to higher education or gainful employment. They are the worst hit during any communal attacks/riots. Women from these sections are raped to humiliate the community enmasse and these most shameful acts are described as 'defense of honour of Hindu women', who are said to have been dishonoured in past history.

In fact the growth of communalism is a threat not only to minorities but also to all oppressed people and democrats. It is Anti-Women, Anti-Dalits, and Anti-people in general.

RSS, BJP combine consists mainly of 'upper' caste/upper class elements. They are tortured by Landlord and big business classes to perpetuate exploitation and have also rallied a section of rich peasants and traders behind them. Funded heavily by rich Marwaris and such other business communities, they aid the oppression of Dalits and other backward castes in favour of the exploiters. Strengthening of 'Hindutva' also means consolidation of Caste System. Dalits who have been stunted and crushed under their feet for ages are claimed to be brothers in their bogus call for 'Hindu unity'.

With so much clichéd talk on 'Self Dignity' and 'Patriotism, what the communal party of BJP is doing is to only continue the mortgage and sale of labouring people and all natural resources belonging to them, to MNC's through liberalization policies, designed to suit the foreign aggressor and their local agents.

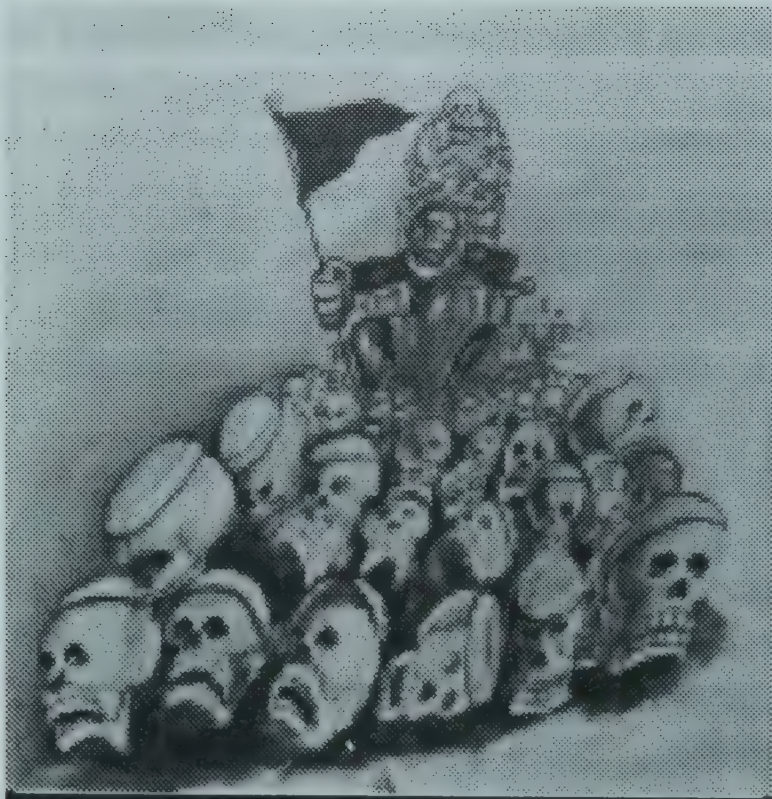
Hindutva politics also clearly point towards a fascist regime where all fundamental rights will be flouted. The Economic and political crisis scenario and the demands made by the Indian ruling classes and imperialists warrant this phenomena. Thus the communal agenda not only aim at curtailing even the minimum democratic space available but also attempts to strangle all dissent voice and create a fear psychosis on the face of Fascism.

Communalism is Anti- Women

In communal politics, the identity of the Community is centered around its religion, which in turn is deeply patriarchal and founded on property relation. The RSS patriarchal Hindu revivalist ideology primarily view women as 'property' meant for the service of men. Insult, injury, sexual harassment and torture of Adivasi and Dalit women is promoted by VHP under the garb of witch hunting. Rapes by those in power are an accepted phenomenon with the rapists even honoured by BJP. Prostitution of women in the name of religion is accorded a fresh lease in various temples. The majority of those who fall a prey to the above are poor dalit and oppressed caste or

tribal women. The Rashtriya Seva Samithi, the women's wing of RSS justifies the dowry system, and wife beating. It hails the practice of child dowry system, and wife beating. It hails the practice of child marriage and sati and prescribes patience and subservience to the Man and the family. They have set up Durga Vahinis which function on the principle of seva, samskriti and satkar which embodies the patriarchal notion of a women's traditional role in the family and society. BJP is mobilizing a sizable number of 'upper' caste, middle class women through the Bharatiya Mahila Morcha to their communal call of Ramjanmabhoomi etc. Not less than 20,000 karsevikas assisted the karsevaks who went to demolish the Babri Masjid, by cooking and cleaning for them. Thus communalism is a double edged sword. It not only destroys women's lives through repeated occurrences of unspeakable violence on their person, their families and minimum means of livelihood, but also seeks to stabilize and encourage the enslavement of women.

In the current context of BJP being in power we find that communalism is assuming larger proportions and newer forms. Hence in memory of the deplorable act of demolition of Babri Masjid on December 6th, 1992 and given the growing danger of communal violence and politics Mahila Jagruthi feels that there is a need for a deepened understanding of the problems, and discussion to find the ways and means to counter the same. Mahila Jagruthi invites all those who are concerned about the issue to actively participate in the workshop arranged for this purpose.



Annexure – II

□ In the last couple of years there have been any number of mob attacks and mass rapes of Muslim women. In Surat rapes were organized under floodlights. Videotaping was done. Rods were inserted into the private parts of the victims. Foetuses were ripped off from the uterus of pregnant women.

A few glimpses of Communal onslaught

□ On 25th June 1998 in Radhikapur village of Panchamahar district in Gujarat following the marriage of two Hindu girls with Muslim boys there has been much loot, violence and burning of houses owned by Muslims, by Bajrang Dal. The State Government has responded by instituting a special police cell to prevent such Inter religious alliances.

□ On the night of September 22nd-23rd 1998 four nuns were gangraped at a Charitable dispensary in Nawapada village of Jabua District of Madhya Pradesh. VHP had not only sponsored this attack but it's All-India Secretary Baikunta Lal Sharma justified the action as an indication of awakening among Hindus.

□ On 3rd and 4th November 1998 at Kaliyadev temple at Shamlaji in Gujarat's eastern tribal belt Adivasi women were stripped naked, beaten and tortured under the guise of driving away evil spirits. This inhuman ritual was conducted with the patronage of armed VHP men, against the will of the local people.

□ As per the study by Vibuti Narayan Rai, Inspector General BSF, police suffer from a pronounced communal bias during riots. The study indicates that while 80% of the riot victims are Muslims, of those arrested 90% are also Muslims, which defies all logic.

□ On the night of 22nd May 1987 during Meerut riot, 300 Muslims, most of who were poor workers, were arrested taken near Ganga canal, where they were lined up and shot to death.

□ Bhagalpur- 1989. Another major riot in the wake of

Ramjanmabhoomi campaign. Provocative slogans against Muslims were raised. Many shops belonging to Muslims were burnt and thousands of them killed.

❑ Mumbai Riots 1992-93. Shri Krishna commission Report clearly spells out the fact that the riots were engineered by the Shiv Sena, its Goonda forces and the police. The Shiv Sena Government in power has not only refused to implement the recommendations of the report but has also threatened to unleash a reign of terror if their crimes are brought to surface.

❑ Coimbatore- Nov 1997 premeditated, calculated looting and arson of many Muslim shops and households all around Coimbatore with the aim of destroying their economic base, by Hindu fundamentalists which was not only unchecked but abetted by the police. CRPF and RAF remained blind to the situation. Even those injured and taken to the hospital were savagely attacked, stabbed to death or burnt alive by RSS men.

❑ In 1997-98 alone there has been a spurt of violence in Christian Institutions and missionaries. A few are listed below:

- 8th March 1998- Vadodara- VHP disturbed a prayer meeting assaulted the participants, destroyed the property. Police beat up and arrested members of the Christian community while the hooligans went scot-free.
- 15th April 1998- Naroda- Catholic church demolished, by BJP, VHP and Bajrang Dal. St. Mary's school vandalized on the pretext that Sanskrit was not taught there.
- 16th July 1998- Zamkhav village- Truckloads of hooligans were let loose on students, parents and teachers belonging to Jesuit School in an attempt to seize the land where the school was situated.
- 18th July 1998- Bhapkal village- A Christian prayer hall burnt by activists of the Hindu Jagaran Manch.

Annexure – III

Interviews with the women leaders of RSS and VHP

The following are excerpts from an article from 'women and Hindu Right' edited by Tanika Sarkar and Urvashi Bhutalia. This particular piece is a reprint of the interviews done by students of Jawaharlal Nehru University of Delhi and a college of South Delhi for their research work on "Women and BJP, RSS, VHP". The opinions/responses of the women leaders of communal organizations like RSS and VHP are Anti-women and reactionary. Though they were very cautious, their views clearly exposes their oppressive ideologies, their aggressiveness towards minority communities and their baseless prejudices and impatience. Hence we are reproducing the selected parts from the interviews as an effort to produce evidences for the arguments put forth in different articles in this booklet.

Editors note

ASHA SHARMA

Rashtriya Sevika Samiti

Q: what is your stand on Women's education?

Asha Sharma (A): We encourage women's education; as an educated mother she will be better equipped to inculcate the right values in her children- the values of nationalism and pride in Indian culture. We are against the concept of a 'modern woman' as she epitomizes selfishness.

We teach women to give first priority to the family- a career should be taken up only in case of financial need and should be subject to the approval of the family. There is a natural division of labour- women, being more sensitive, should take care of children. Everything else is secondary.

Q: Should the men not share the burden of home making?

A: They are not equipped for this task. Only a woman has the sensitivity to keep the family together.

Q: What are your views on sati?

A: Sati is derived from the word *satitva* which means 'purity of mind

and the body' and the willingness of a woman to give supreme sacrifice to save this purity- as in the case of self immolation during the partition riots.

Q: Do you endorse Roop Kanwar's sati?

A: That was not a voluntary sati. This is why we encourage physical training of women.

Q: How do you see the mobilization of women in the demolition of the Babri Masjid?

A: What masjid? There was no masjid there. It was a symbol of humiliation which was removed to safeguard the self-respect of the Hindus. As far as women are concerned, they have always come forward in times of crisis.

KRISHNA SHARMA

Women's wing, Vishwa Hindu Parishad

Q: What is the role of the schools run by the VHP?

Krishna Sharma (K): During the children's formative years, we concentrate on Dharmic (religious) studies- Gayatri *mantra*, Hanuman *chaleesa*, etc., This is followed by regular formal education.

A sense of community is imbibed by celebrating festivals like Holi, Shivaji Jayanti and Maharana Pratap Jayanti. We also encourage our students to follow purely Indian culture.

Q: what do you mean by 'purely Indian culture'?

K: The culture that has prevailed since aeons- the way of life that is followed by the majority. Hindu dharma is not just Hindu religion; it assimilates the larger Indian consciousness.

Q: Is your school open to girls?

K: Yes, we encourage women to study.

Q: Do you follow the same pattern of education for boys and girls?

K: We also teach women to demand less- when women demand more, it leads their menfolk to corruption. A man may be satisfied with two sets of clothes but women will desire a dozen saris. Overall, we have a similar pattern of education. Women, saints and politicians make a nation- but it is women who give birth to saints and politicians. Ram's greatness was because of Sita, Kaushalya and Kaikei. Ram took Kaikei into confidence and requested her to ask for the two boons so that he could go in to exile to destroy Ravan. It was Kaikei's sacrifice that enabled Ram to accomplish

his mission. A happy life is not possible unless women compromise and are willing to sacrifice.

Q: Why can't men sacrifice or compromise?

K: They can, but it comes more easily to women because they are more emotional. This is what happened in Vedic times.

(At this point she asked our names to find out which community we belonged to. After this she launched into an anti-Muslim tirade and held the Muslim invasion responsible for the deteriorating condition of women).

.....In Kashmir, there is parading of naked (Hindu) women (she was unable to substantiate this with factual information).

If a girl who has been raped commits suicide, will her brother not take revenge? Hindus must make sure that they are feared by others. We have to prove our mettle. If they rape 10-15 of our women, we must also rape a few to show them that we are no less.

Muslims have four wives and can even marry within their own family. When they cannot look upon their own cousins with respect, how will they respect other women? It is because of this that women were forced to kill themselves at the time of the partition.

Q: If a family can afford only one child's education, whom should it choose, the girl or the boy child?

K: It is important that both get basic education but as it is the man who must earn and support his family (while the woman manages the household), his education is more important. This division of labour is natural. (We were told that if a gun and a doll are placed before two children the male child will pick up the gun while the female will opt for the doll).

Q: If a girl who is being married off by her family against her wishes, seeks help from the women's wing of the VHP, what advice will you give her?

K: Though every woman wants to get married, she does not say so due to her cultural conditioning. Every father wishes to see his daughter married and hence be assured of social security.

Q: What would you suggest in case she wishes to pursue her education?

K: After marriage she will have many responsibilities in her new home. It is not advisable for her to bring disquiet by refusing to compromise. If ordained by her fate, her husband will permit her to study.

Q: A girl may wish to marry a person her parents do not approve

of....

K: We try and explaining to her that her parents have lived longer; they know what is best for her. We oppose a marriage only if there is a wide age gap between the bride and the groom. Earlier on, the child bride and groom grew up together, so there was no question of incompatibility. Late marriage leads to adjustment problems. However, in today's context, it (child marriage) is no longer legally acceptable.

Q: What advice would you give to a victim of wife beating?

K: Don't parents admonish their children for misbehaviour? Just as child must adjust to his/her parents, so must a wife act keeping in mind her husband's moods and must avoid irritating him. Only this can keep the family together.

Q: In spite of all adjustment, if the beating continues, how should the wife react, 'to keep the family together'?

K: Ideally, if she learns to stifle her screams, the matter will remain within the four walls of the house. Otherwise every house will become a "Mahabharat". However, if she is persistently beaten for no particular reason, then she can take up the matter with her kith and kin (*biradari*); legal action should remain the last resort.

The family you are born into and the family you are married into are predestined. Just as you cannot change your parents you, also cannot change your husband.

Q: But the legal system permits divorce. How do you react to that?

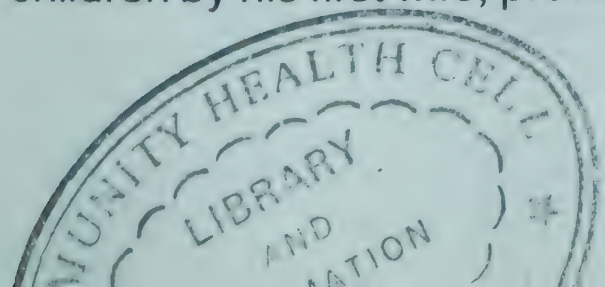
K: If a woman seeks divorce, we advise her to try to adjust, since a woman cannot remain single, when she remarries, she will face similar problems in her new home. Divorce, therefore, will not change her situation. Conciliation would be a better option, both for the woman and her children. Divorce can be considered only if every other option fails. Moreover, with diseases like AIDS monogamy is advisable for women.

Q: But there preventive measurers.....

K: They are a not foolproof. Moreover an Indian woman can attain true happiness only with one man.

Q: What are your views on polyandry?

K: Though it could be justified earlier as the sex ratio favoured women, times have changed. However, a man may remarry if he does not have any children by his first wife, provided she agrees.



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Q: Can a woman remarry in a similar situation?

K: No, society will not allow it- neither will the man's ego permit it.

Q: In case a man remarries after an extramarital affair, what course of action would you suggest for the first wife?

K: Admittedly, it is a difficult situation for her, but she should try to accept it for the sake of the children, more so, if she is not financially independent.

All these problems arise because of westernisation. Even the west reveres Indian family life, but we are forgetting our roles as *janmatris* and *nirmatris*.

In the joint family system, the couple's interaction was limited and the attraction remained alive for years after the marriage. Now, with the western concept of honeymoon and nuclear family they grow weary of each other in no time, leading to various problems.

In the West, women don't hesitate to drag their own husbands to the court with allegations of rape.

Q: What else can victim of conjugal rape do?

K: If a couple is married, how can you call it rape- this concept is alien to our culture. In any case, if a woman is physically and mentally strong, she can assert herself.

Interviewers: S.Anitha, Manisha, Vasudha, Kavitha –Research Scholars from Delhi.

Courtesy: "Women and Hindu Right" – edited by Tanika Sarkar and Urvashi Bhutalia.

Annexure - IV

GUJARAT RIOTS: THE TOP FIVE MYTHS AND FACTS

On February 27th Sabarmati express carrying karsevaks from Ayodhya was torched near Godhra. The Coalition against Communalism unequivocally condemns this act of violence. From February 28th on frenzied mobs all over Gujarat started burning and butchering the Muslim population looting their property and vandalising their place of worship. Till date, over 2000 people have lost their lives in the post Godhra violence and nearly 100,000 (one lakh) have been displaced. The Coalition against communalism strongly condemns the Gujarat Government for its complete failure of governance during the riots, for inciting violence against minorities and for its continued failure to provide relief and aid to the victims of the carnage.

MYTH 1: The riots in Gujarat are a spontaneous expression of Hindu anger or Hindu sentiment.

FACT: These ‘riots’ were a pre-planned, cold-blooded, calculated, willfully executed massacre of the minority community. In other contexts, such occurrences have been referred to as ‘genocide’ or ‘ethnic cleansing’. They were carried out in connivance with civic, administrative and political bodies.

- ◆ People and homes of the Muslim community were targeted using voter list, license and other such information that only the civic administration can provide.
- ◆ In commercial districts, where business and shops of Hindus and Muslims co-exist, the mobs burnt only the Muslim-owned shops. This shows calculation and planning, not mob ‘frenzy’.
- ◆ If ‘Hindu outrage’ is enough to explain these riots, then why did the violence only erupt in Gujarat? In Ayodhya where over 15000 frenzied karsevaks had aggregated, the civic administration

performed their constitutional duty and maintained peace, while in Gujarat, the State Government actively encouraged the violence.

MYTH 2: The Government is doing its best to maintain peace and harmony in Gujarat, provide relief to the riot victims and apprehend those involved in rioting.

FACT: The State Government is the instigator as well as the facilitator of these riots. Not only did the Government deliberately delay all attempts to control the situation during the riots, but is still failing in its responsibility to provide relief to the victims or ensure justice for them.

- ◆ The deployment of the army was deliberately delayed by the State and Central Governments.
- ◆ The State police were at best inactive, and most likely complicit, in the butchering of the people and looting and destruction of property. The electronic and print media have extensively documented the collaboration of the police in providing diesel from State vehicles for burning people and property, preventing medical aid and fire brigades from reaching the victims, and in some cases, actually handing over people (who had sought police protection) to the saffron clad butchers.
- ◆ Relief camps set up by NGO's to help the riot victims now house nearly one lakh people, but there has been little or no Government help. What little is coming is too little too late, for example, spoiled food and torn clothes rejected from last years earthquake relief efforts!
- ◆ The Government has shown little inclination to investigate the riots. It first set up a judicial enquiry to investigate the train burning ONLY, and agreed to extend it to cover the post-Godhra violence only when faced with wide spread criticism. Even so, it has appointed a retired Gujarat High Court judge who is notorious for his anti-minority judgements, one of which was over turned by the Supreme Court of India

with the comment that “the finding of the judge is not based on appreciation of evidence but on imagination”.

In such a situation, where the State is directly implicated in contributing to violence, it is necessary that a independent and impartial of judges be assigned to the commission.

MYTH 3: The RSS-VHP-Bajrang Dal-BJP (Sangh Parivar) are pro-Hindus and patriots.

FACT: The Sangh Parivar is anti-Hindu and propagates a narrow, distorted version of Hinduism. Nor do these groups care for the country or its citizens.

- ◆ The Sangh Parivar has demolished multi-faith Dargahs and even Hindu temples, including *Ram ka Chabutara* and *Sita ki Rasoi* in Ayodhya in 1992.
- ◆ **Main stream Hindu religious leaders oppose the VHP and Bajrang Dal.**
 - o Even among the orthodox five of the seven akhadas, or religious orders (of Hinduism), in Ayodhya are against the VHP and its bloody tactics, the Shankaracharya of Goverdhanpuri has condemned the ongoing mob violence in Gujarat as “State terrorism” and demanded that VHP leaders be arrested under the National Security Act, and Shankaracharyas of all the four main *peeths*- Dwarka, Puri, Joshimath and Sringeri- are bitterly opposed to the VHP’s temple movement.
 - o The VHP-Bajrang Dal have insulted revered religious leaders and purohits who have disagreed with the VHP’s narrow vision of Hinduism. The Hindu priest in charge of the idols at the Ram Janmabhoomi site, pujari Laldas, was harassed for saying the following: “(Riots) were caused for financial and political gain...I am the priest of the Ram Janmabhoomi temple. I can honestly say that until today VHP

members never made a single offering nor even prayed in this temple... They don't care if people are killed, all they care about is money and power. Those who speak of a Hindu Nation and create violence in the name of Ram are upper caste, they all love the good life, there's not an iota of renunciation or sacrifice or public concern in them....." (Interview contained in the documentary, *In the Name of God*). **When the BJP came to power in Uttar Pradesh in 1992, Pujari Laldas was removed from his post as head priest of the Ram temple. A year later Pujari Laldas was murdered.**

- ◆ **Ordinary Hindus are also fed up with these groups:** The majority of Hindus have always voted against the BJP, even when it has formed the government at the center. Recent elections in U.P and Delhi have shown that even in BJP strongholds, the electorate has rejected them.
 - "*Ram mandir ke naam par desh ki barbaadi ho rahi hai* (the country is being ruined by this Ram mandir issue). It is only going to weaken the country"- Rajinder Singh, a cement plant worker.
 - "*Aadmi khoon ka pyaasa hogaya hai* (man is killing man). All this is against the Hindu *sanskriti* (tradition) ... There should be both a mandir and a masjid at Ayodhya" –Sunita Yadav, a sweetshop owner's wife from Mathura.
- ◆ **The Sangh Parivar does not believe in the Indian Constitution**, and instead of using democratic means to put forth their views, they resort to violence, openly flout the orders of the Supreme Court, oppose the very fundamental principle of equality and liberty upon which the Indian State is based, and demonize an entire community based on the actions of a few people who happen to claim the same religion.
- ◆ **The Sangh Parivar's philosophy is anti-democratic at its core.** Despite participating in electoral politics, the Sangh Parivar has never believed

in democracy. This is what Hedgewar, the founder of RSS, had to say:

“I have thought out a scheme based on Hindu Dharma Shastra, which provides for standardization of Hinduism throughout India....But the point is that this ideal cannot be brought to effect unless we have our own swaraj as a Hindu as dictator like Shivaji of old, or Mussolini or Hitler of the present day in Italy and Germany. But this does not mean that we have to sit with folded hands until some such dictator arises in India. We should formulate a scientific scheme and carry on propaganda for it”

◆ **The VHP, Bajrang-Dal, RSS have all the hallmarks of fundamentalist-terrorist groups and their behaviour is indistinguishable from the Taliban:**

- **They are self appointed guardians of morality**, which they impose on pain of physical intimidation and destruction of property, by roving gangs of state sponsored ruffians. They pass judgements on what can be shown on TV and Cable, what movies should be allowed, what festivals or occasions people can or cannot celebrate.
- **Ancient monument of historical relevance are being destroyed much like the destruction of the Bamiyan Buddhas by the Taliban.** In addition to the 16th Century Mosque Babri Masjid that was destroyed by these militant Hindu organisations in 1992, several dozen mosques were destroyed in the recent riots in Gujarat, including the 16th Century mosque near the Jethabai step wells which had been classified as a protected site by

the archaeological survey of India. VHP has a stated goal of destroying India's heritage by targeting heritage monuments such as the Taj Mahal and Qutub Minar.

- o **Gyan Das, the Hindu leader (Mahant) of the Nirvani Akhada in Ayodhya also compares the VHP to the Taliban.** "How has this man (Ashok Singhal, working president of the VHP) who is responsible for fanning hatred and blood shed in the entire country, been allowed to step into Ayodhya?" fumes Gyan Das. "Singhal is the head of the country's Taliban and, like in Afghanistan, this group will destroy the nation".
- o **The VHP, Bajrang Dal, RSS organise and train private, armed militias for the express purpose of creating terror.**

MYTH 4: Sabarmati Express incident is terrorism while the post-Godhra carnage in Gujarat is 'mere' communal riots.

FACT: The post Ghodra violence was highly organised with a distinct aim of spreading terror amongst the minorities, and is most definitely terrorism- worse yet, state sponsored terrorism.

- ◆ **Was the Sabarmati Express massacre in Godhra an act of terrorism?** While there are several conflicting stories about whether the heinous massacre at Godhra was pre-planned or spontaneous, there is as yet, no evidence that points to an ISI involvement. By claiming a foreign hand, the Government is deflecting attention from its own failure to provide sufficient security to the karsevaks. The BJP led Government seems to have as little regard for

Hindu lives as it has demonstrated for Muslim lives.

◆ **Is post-Godhra violence in Gujarat terrorism?** Going by the yardstick of pre-planning and organisation, it is clear that the post-Godhra violence was most definitely terrorism. The attacks on Muslims were well planned, incited and carried out by identifiable groups (the VHP and Bajrang Dal), and encouraged by the state machinery- *violence as a product of deliberate strategy*; the attacks were carried out in a dramatic way to attract publicity and create an atmosphere of alarm among Muslims far beyond the actual victims- *violence as theater*. The very definitions of terrorism.

However provocative the Godhra massacre might have been, we must distinguish between the state sponsored terrorism and extra state actors. If terrorists attack, you turn to the state, but if the state turns terrorist then where do you look for help?

MYTH 5: Hindus and Muslims cannot live together in peace. Riots are the natural outcome of simmering tensions.

FACT: Hindus and Muslims for the most part lived together peacefully. Communal tensions have been actively stoked by some groups leading to riots.

◆ Villages hold two third of India's population, but account for less than four percent of the communal riot related deaths. According to Prof. Ashutosh Varshney, 50% of riot deaths since 1960 have happened in eight cities which hold only 6% of India's population.

Another 45% of riot related death have occurred in other urban centers.

◆ **Communal forces use terror and threats to actively divide the communities.**

when Hindus try to support their Muslims neighbours during the killings in Gujarat, the VHP and Bajrang Dal goons targeted them also. The case of Prof. Bandukwala, a well known academician from Vadodara is well documented. An organised mob attacked him in his house in a predominantly Hindu locality and his car was set on fire. He and his daughter were sheltered by their Hindu, who in turn were attacked on the second day for protecting him (*NDTV Interview*).

Courtesy: Coalition against Communalism.



Mahila Jagruthi is an organisation that campaigns and struggles for the rights of the oppressed women. Mahila Jagruthi fights against all forms of patriarchal discrimination, violence and oppressive culture in society and family. It opposes the feudal and Imperialist exploitation, which preserve, nurture and perpetuate patriarchy. It strongly condemns the caste system and caste atrocities and the poisonous communal ideology and practice with its inbuilt politics of hatred. Mahila Jagruthi believes in building a strong women's movement and in actively participating and extending possible support to various peoples struggles, which could together proceed to fundamentally transform the present patriarchal, oppressive, undemocratic socio economic system and family structure.

The booklet is meant for a deeper understanding of Hindu communalism and its impact on women. Communalism is one of the greatest threats to any democratic notion of change in society and attempts to destroy even all efforts in that direction. If we do not counter the grave danger of fascist communal onslaught, we are bound to end up in a horrific atmosphere of unending persecution and unspeakable crimes with women being the worst victims as has been witnessed in Gujarat recently. More is to follow. Their trishul is aimed at all who question them. We already have the unnerving history of Hitler's Germany where in the name of patriotism, Nationalism and so-called racial purity all kinds of violence were openly unleashed. The Sangh Parivar which is following the Nazi footsteps is also glorifying all its violence on minorities on similar lines, wielding religion and pseudo-nationalism as weapons.

We cannot afford to allow such history to repeat itself. And if we do we cannot even forgive ourselves or ever hold our heads high calling ourselves as 'human' beings.

Mahila Jagruthi strives for a united, multi-pronged struggle against the Hindutva politics at all levels. We hope this book is one step in that direction.

Suggested contribution : R